ARIFURETA SHOKUGYOU DE SEKAISAIKYOU
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Arifureta Shokugyou de Sekai Saikyou

(ありふれた職業で世界最強)

From Common Job Class to the Strongest in the World

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Story Description:

Among the class that was transported to another world, Nagumo Hajime is an ordinary male student who doesn't have ambition nor aspiration in life, called by his classmates as "Incompetent". The class is summoned to become heroes and save a country from destruction, students of these class are blessed with cheat specs and cool job class, but that's not the case with Hajime, his job class is a "Synergist" and his stats are very normal (mediocre). "Synergist", to put it in another word is just

artisan class. Being the weakest, he then falls to the depth of the abyss when he and his classmates are exploring a dungeon. What did he find in the depth of the abyss and can he survive?

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Chapter 0: Prologue

In the darkness, the light quickly disappears. Even unconscious the hand reached out to grasp at nothing, while falling there was a sense of tightening in the nether region. Nagumo Hajime's face distorted with fear as the light disappeared from his vision

Currently, Hajime was falling down a deep cliff that looked like the entrance to hell. The only light visible was the light that illuminated the ground above. As he continued to fall the light no longer reached him, the surrounding turned black, Hajime

searched the dungeon, and on the cervices of the sides he saw a revolving lantern as the sound of wind passed by him.

Being a Japanese myself, the inequality that he tasted when he came to this world was too hard to represent in words and the hope that this fantasy world would rid of it, the current history of the misfortune that he tasted in progressive form.

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Monday, the most melancholy of all the days has just started. For most people, at this time of the week would sigh, while the previous day would be heaven to them.

And Nagumo Hajime was not an exception to this notion. However, in Hajime's case, it was not just a simple bother, the cozy school was associated with a very bad feeling, probably because he was depressed. As always, when the last bell chimed at school, he opened the door to the classroom with his tired body from pulling an all-nighter.

At that moment, Hajime received glares and clicking of tongues from the majority of the male students in the classroom. The girls did not have a friendly expression either. It was fine if the people were indifferent, but there were those who had an expression of contempt directed at him.

Hajime tried to play it off as he

headed to his seat, but there was always people who would mess with him every time.

"Hey Kimoota*! Did you play games all night again? Was it an eroge I wonder?"

"Uwa, gross. Staying up all night to play eroge is super disgusting."

What the heck do they find funny to guffaw at? The laughter came from Hiyama Daisuke. He is the leader of the students that pick on Hajime on a daily routine. The three next to him with the stupid laugh were Saito Yoshiki, Kondo Reiichi, and Nakano Shinji, these four were the ones that picked on Hajime the most frequently.

As Hiyama stated, Hajime was an otaku. Hajime's appearance and behavior was not that bad to be called Kimoota or to be ridiculed. His hair was trimmed short and he did not have bedhead hair. He did not have an assertive personality but that did not mean he was anti-social, besides he clearly replied back to people. He was quiet, but he did not give off a feeling of creepiness. Hajime simply liked things like manga, light novels, games, and movies.

The criticism that otaku's receive from society is certainly strong, generally speaking the degree of ridicule varies but it never reaches open hostility. Yet, why does all the male students show unrestrained contempt and hostility?

The answer was a girl.

"Nagumo-kun, Good Morning! Almost late as usually, you should come earlier."

The girl walks up to Hajime as she is smiling. In this class, no wait this whole school, she is one of the few exceptions that treated Hajime friendly.

Her name was Shirasaki Kaori. She is known as one of the two goddesses of the school, popular among both male and female students and known for her very beautiful looks. Kaori had long glossy black hair that reached her waist, and large slightly weeping eyes that conveyed a sense of gentleness. She had a straight

bridge nose that was small, and thin lips of Sakura colors arranged to perfection.

Always the girl with the endless smile, is very caring and has a strong sense of responsibility that often people, regardless of school year, rely on her help. She is always seen with a sincere expression without any unpleasantness, that is why it is hard to believe she was just a high school student.

So, why does someone like Kaori treat Hajime so well? This has caused many sleepless nights for Hajime and the student body (He got average grades as a result), it was thought that it was because of Kaori's good nature that warranted the treatment.

Now, Hajime's class attitude should improve, if Kaori was dealing with an Ikemen than it would have been acceptable, unfortunately, Hajime was very ordinary, on hand his reputation for "a life of hobbies" did not see an improvement of the attitude against him. That such a person as Hajime can be so friendly with Kaori, the ordinary male students could not stand it. Often they think "Why is it only him?" The female students simply, because they believe Hajime is taking advantage of Kaori's kind nature, seem to be uncomfortable with him.

"Ah, Good Morning Shirasaki-san."

Uwa, is this Saki?! Is what he wanted to say, but he saw the glint

of the eyes and just contorted his face in discomfort as he returned the greeting.

And Kaori just wore a joyful expression. Why does she have such an expression? Furthermore the glaze was so piercing that he could feel the flow of cold sweat. Hajime wondered every single time. Why does someone like Kaori, who is hailed as the most beautiful in the school, associate herself with him. In Hajime's eyes, there is just something about Kaori's nature that he did not think about yet.

However, he was not going to flatter himself thinking that it was romantic feelings. Hajime himself, had given up self-awareness in his pursuit of his hobbies. Because of

his lack of self-awareness his looks were average and so was his athletic ability. So when you compared him to her, he was nowhere close to being good enough. Therefore, her attitude is a mystery.

Besides that, can you be a little more aware of the Saki storm brewing! I say in my innermost thoughts. If I had voiced it, I have no doubt that someone would take me behind the gym...

When I attempted to end the conversation there, three students got closer to us.

"Nagumo-kun, Good Morning. It's troublesome every day."

"Kaori, are you looking after him again? Really, Kaori is really kind."

"For real, no matter what you say to this unmotivated guy, it won't work."

The name of the girl that greeted him, from the three, is Yaegashi Shizuku. Kaori's best friend. Her trademark was her long black hair done in a ponytail. Her slightly slit eyes was sharp, but in the depths there is a feeling of softness, this gives her the impression of being cool rather than cold. She was tall for a girl at 172 cm, her posture and physique was very dignify and it was similar to how a samurai was.

In fact, her family is in ownership of a Kenjutsu dojo. Shizuku herself

is a vetran of her family style. Since she was a child, she had never lost in a tournament. Currently she appears in magazines as the "Beautiful Swordwoman", she even have some diehard fans.

The underclasswomen would call her "Onee-sama" because of their admiration.

Next, the one that spoke a little clumsily to Kaori was Amanogawa Kouki. Just like his name he was the perfect man, good looks, athletic, smart, and good personality. He had silky brown hair and gentle eyes. His body was toned and slender at about 180 cm. Kouki was nice to everyone and had a very strong sense of justice. Since he was small he attended the Yaegashi Kenjutsu

dojo. Like Shizuku, he was a national level athlete. Shizuku and him are childhood friends. Dozens of girls have fallen for him, but he is always close to Kaori and Shizuku so the other girls are hesitant to confess their feelings. Still he is a very popular guy that gets confessed to at least twice a month from all over.

The last person was a male with a very reckless feeling named Sakagami Ryutaro, Kouki's best friend. He is muscle brain that does not care about the finer details in things. His physique is like a bear and he stand tall at about 190 cm. The eyes he has shows playfulness and sharpness. Ryutaro is a very hot blooded individuals that like others that put in effort like him, he does

not like Hajime because of his lackluster approach to life. Even now, he choose to ignore Hajime.

"Ohayo, Yaegashi-san, Tennokawa-kun, Sakagami-kun. Haha, Maa, there is no helping it since it's my own fault."

To their greetings, Hajime just gives a bitter smile. "Teme, What selfish words did you say to Yaegashi-san? Aaa?" I wanted to say but a stare stopped me*. Both the girls were very popular, Shizuku's reputation would not lose to Kaori's.

"If you knew about it, why not fix it? I think you are fawning over Kaori's kindness. Kaori is not just trying to bother you."

Kouki admonishes Hajime. In Kouki's eyes, Hajime is not taking Kaori's kindness with any sincerity. It's not like he wanted to be babied! Rather please just leave me alone! I wanted to argue with him, but there would be more trouble if I did. There was no use in arguing with Kouki because he always felt he was right.

Even if they asked him to "fix" his hobbies, his hobbies was at the center of his life. Because, his father was a game creator and his mother was a shoujo mangaka, in the future he wanted to get a partime job at his father's company or mother's workplace.

He was already practicing his skills, and all his hobbies were perfect for

his plans. Hajime did not feel like changing his life style because he had given serious thoughts about it already. If Kaori had not taken an interest in Hajime, he would have lived a quiet student life.

"Iya~Ahaha..."

Therefore, laughingly, Hajime let it go. However, the goddess of unawareness dropped a bomb again like always.

"Kouki-kun, What are you saying? I'm just talking to Nagumo-kun because I want to."

Zawatto*, the classroom became noisy. The male students glared and clenched their teeth with Saki at that. Hiyama's group started to

consider where they could take Hajime during the lunch break.

"Oh?....Aa, Really, Kaori is so nice."

Kouki seems to take Kaori's response about Hajime at face value. Kouki's was a good person, but he lacked the perception to really understand the meaning of what is being said. Hajime took this time to look up at the sky to escape the awkward situation.

"...Gomenasaine? I don't want to rude to you two but...."

At that place the person with the best understanding of people, Shizuku, secretly apologized to Hajime. Hajime replied with a "No choice" with a grin and a shrug.

At that time the bell chimed to signal the start of class, as their teacher entered the classroom. The teacher conveyed the usually information. And, Hajime started his daydream, while the class started.

Looking at that Hajime, Kaori smiled, Shizuku just grinned, males were clicking their tongues, girls were directing a gaze of scorn.

* * *

I returned to consciousness at the feeling of the class's bustle. Since it was a habitual sleep, he had a timing of when to wake up. The kind of feeling he got, signify that it was lunch break.

Hajime raises his face from the desk and takes out his basic lunch with a rustling sound. Looking around the people who were buying food were already out the class, so the number of people in class were decreasing. Still, there were still about 2/3 of the class with their bento left, while their 4th period social studies teacher Hatakeyama Aiko (25 years old) was chatting with several students near the podium.

Ji~yururu, ki~yupon!

Immediately, Hajime tried to take a nap after eating his lunch. However, a certain goddess would not all it, for Hajime she was the devil, smiled as she approached his desk.

Hajime inwardly moaned "Damn!" He seemed to be especially sleepy on Mondays. Usually before Kaori's and the other interacted with him, he would have been gone to find a place to sleep, but those two days of all nighters had taken a toll on him.

"Nagumo-kun, how rare it is to find you in class at lunch. Obento? If you want let's eat together."

Once again, a disturbing atmosphere filled the classroom, Hajime scream in his heart. No, who do you pay attention to me now? Without meaning to, an unknown dialect almost escaped from his mouth. Hajime tried to refuse.

"Ah, thanks for the offer, Shirasaki-

san. However, I have already finished eating so why not join the others?"

As I said that, I showed her my empty lunch pack that was completely gone. To refuse such an offer people would think "Who is this guy?", but it's better than the constant nagging he would get.

However, such a low level refusal was not enough to stop the Goddess from trying.

"Eh! You only ate that much? That's not good, you should eat properly. I'll give you some of mine!"

(Give me a break! Notice it! Notice the atmosphere!)

Suddenly my saviors appeared,

when I started to produce a cold sweat from the increasing pressure. It was Kouki's group.

"Kaori. Let's eat together. It seems like Nagumo hasn't slept enough yet. I won't allow such a sleepyhead to enjoy Kaori's delicious meal."

Kaori just laughs refreshingly at Kouki's smug response. For someone as insensitive as Kaori, an Ikemen's smile and words had no effect on her.

"Eh? What are you unable to allow?"

Shizuku unwittingly blew out a laugh at Kaori's response. Kouki just laughs at that and starts to just chat it up. Still 4 of the most

famous students were gathered around Hajime's desk and that did not allow the glares to weaken.

Hajime complained to himself and let out a sigh.

(Already, these guys are in their own worlds. No matter how you look at these 4, they are caught up in their own atmosphere. Please someone from another world summon him.)

Hajime tries to escape reality. When he was about to moving away he was frozen.

In front of his eyes, a complex array of snow white circles appeared before him. The students also noticed this weird phenomenon. He

watched as the patterns shined and the force that held him started to hold the other students, he thought it was a magic formation.

The magic formation got gradually brighter and soon expanded to the size of the whole classroom. When the students finally processed the situation they tried to move and scream. When the formation started to shine, Aiko-sensei shouted "Everybody get out", but at this instance the formation exploded.

The light covered the classroom for a few seconds, then a few minutes. When it cleared no one was left in the classroom. The classroom was devoid of human life but all their belongings, that were not on them,

were left behind.

The world would later call this a Spirited Away incident, but that is for another time.

Chapter 1: Summoned to a Different World

Template summons.

* * *

Hajime stood there with his hands protecting his face and his eyes closed, but when he heard the rustling noise he slowly opened his eyes.

Hajime looked around in utter amazement. The first thing to catch his eyes was a huge mural. The mural was about 10 meters in height, there was a person with

androgynous features that had an aureole in the back and long flowing blonde hair with a slight smile on the mural. A grassy plain, a lake, and mountains are drawn in the background and the person had both of their hands extended out. It is a beautiful mural. It is a great mural. However, Hajime felt that the eyes were somewhat cold.

When he looked around, he noticed that they were in a huge hall. He wondered if the whole hall was made of marble. The whole building was done with a smooth white luster, it had huge pillars that was carved beautifully holding it up, and the ceiling was done in a dome shape. The whole place looked like a cathedral and the hall had a very solemn atmosphere.

It seemed that Hajime and the rest were at the top of a pedestal that was located in the deepest part of the building. They were in a position higher than the surrounding area. His classmates also looked around stunned at what they were seeing. Apparently, all that students that were present in the classroom at that time, was caught up in the situation.

Hajime glanced behind. There was Kaori also looking around stunned at was before them. She did not seem to be injured, so Hajime felt relief.

Perhaps, the people that were surrounding the pedestal would be able to explain the situation. Yeah, Hajime and his classmates were not

the only ones here. There were at least 30 people on their knees giving prayer with both their hands in front of their chest. All of them wore a white robe that was embroidered with gold, and they had a staff right next to them. At the tip of the staves it spread out like a fan, and several pieces of disks hung around it in a circle.

One particular priest looked to be about 70 years old, what made him stand out was his very formal headwear that was close to 30 cm in height, stepped forward towards them. Though with his old age, he was wearing too flashy of a robe. He might have passed for someone in his 50s if not for the wrinkles that engraved his face.

The old priest spoke to them with a clear and calming voice that fit his appearance, with the staff in his hand.

"Welcome to Tortus, our Hero and his fellow countrymen. We welcome you all. I am called Ishtar Lombard and I am the Pope of the Church of Saints. Please let's get along."

After he introduced himself, he presented a smile that was often associated with nice elderly people.

* * *

Currently, Hajime and the rest moved locations, they had passed through the great hall and saw some tables lined up 10 meters in

front of them. Without exception this room was made with gorgeous details. From a layman's perspective, it seemed like all the works that decorated the room was made with masterful technique. Probably this was where they were going to eat. Kouki's group of 4 and Aiko-sensei sat at the head of the table. Hajime sat at the last spot.

Nobody made any noise as they were guided to this area and seated, their minds were still trying to work out what happened to them. It was up to Ishtar to explain the situation, even Kouki with his EX Charisma was silently wondering. Aiko-sensei gathered the students like a teacher should, with teary eyes.

When everyone was seated, with

amazing timing, the maids entered pushing carts. Yeah, real maids! Not like those fat Obaa-sans maids that plagued the earth. These were real and true beautiful woman, beautiful women maids that embodied the dreams of a man.

The majority of the class boys stared at the maids because of their adolescent minds. Though the girls were sending cold glares at them.

Hajime instinctively stares at the maid that comes by his side to serve the drinks...but for some reason he felt a chill down his spine and he fixed his staring. When he faced the direction of the chill, Hajime saw Kaori smiling at him. Hajime decided to stop looking.

Ishtar started his explanation after he confirmed that everyone had gotten a drink.

"I'm sure you are all confused. I will explain first, so please listen till the end before asking any questions."

After that, Ishtar arbitrarily explained the situation and it seemed like a fantasy.

In summary.

First, the world was called Tortus. In this world, there were three major races. Humans, Devils, and demi-humans. The Humans ruled over the north area. The Devils ruled over the south area. The demi-humans lived quietly in the wilderness to the east.

Of these, the Humans and Devils have been in a war for several hundred years. When compared a Devil was much stronger than a Human but Humans had the number advantage. Both sides have not been in a large-scale war in a few decades, but they are preparing themselves. Recently there has been abnormal happenings occurring. The deployment of monsters by the Devils.

Monsters are said to be a variant of wild animals that took in magic and changed. They were not considered real living organisms. They had the power to mimic peculiar magic that other races used, and this made them powerful and dangerous animals.

Until now there were very few people that could tame them. Even if they could be tamed, the tamer could only control 1 or 2 monsters at most. This common thought was completely reversed by the Devils. This meant that the Humans no longer had their number advantage. Now the Human race was facing a crisis.

"The one to have summoned you here is Eht-sama. He is the god that protect us and the one we worship in the Church of Saints. He is the one that created this world. Most likely Eht-sama realized that if things remained this way the Humans would face destruction. For this reason you were summoned to avoid this future. The world you come from is higher

ranked than ours, the people from your world would have exceptional power here. Before the summon, we prayed to Eht-sama. You were the "salvation" that he sent.

With your powers, we will overthrow the Devils and save the Humans by the will of Eht-sama."

Ishtar said this with a very rapt expression. He was most likely recalling what the oracle had told him. More than 90% of Humans followed the teachings of the Church, those who have heard the oracle is often assigned to a position of power.

Hajime suspected this so called "Will of God". He felt that Ishtar was distorting what the world really

was and what it faced. People that wanted to protest suddenly appeared. It was Aiko-sensei.

"Please don't joke around! In the end, these children will be fighting in a war! I won't allow such a thing! I will absolutely not allow such a thing! Please let us return! Surely, their families will be worried about them! What you have done is merely kidnapping!"

Aiko-sensei was angry. She was a very popular social studies teacher that was 25 years old. She had a baby like face with her 150 cm height. Her hair was done in a bob cut. For her student's sake she tried her best and it was very heartwarming. There was often times when the students were

protected by her even though her physique was not that adult like.

The students often called her Ai-chan, even if she got angry when they referred to her as such. She was aiming to be a dignified teacher.

She was angered at the unreasonable summoning and stood up against it. Ah, Ai-chan is trying her best again. There were students who were looking at Aiko-sensei's admonishment of Ishtar with a fuzzy feeling. The following words from Ishtar froze them.

"I sympathize with your feelings. Unfortunately we have no way to return you."

Silence filled the halls. There was a cold air that appeared throughout the whole area. Everyone gaze at Ishtar, not knowing what to say to that.

"That's impossible, what do you mean not possible? If you can summon us, you can send us back!"

Aiko-sensei shouted out.

"As I said earlier, it was Eht-sama that summoned you. The magic that interferes with other worlds is a magic we humans cannot use. Whether or not you can return it is left up to Eht-sama to decide."

"Such a thing..."

Aiko-sensei lost her strength at that point and dropped into her chair

like a stone. The students started to rustle at that.

"Lies! Why can't we return?"

"Iyaa. I just want to return!"

"Don't even joke about war! Don't mess with me!"

"Why, Why, Why...."

The students started to panic at the situation. Even Hajime was not okay with this. However, being an Otaku he had read many situations like this before. Therefore, he expected these patterns. Since it was not the worst pattern, he was a lot calmer than the other students. Incidentally one of the worst pattern was being summoned to be a slave.

While everyone was taken off guard, Ishtar was just calming watching the students' reactions and choose to let it flow naturally. However, Hajime could see that behind that calm expression there was contempt for them. The priest was probably thinking that they should be honored to be picked by Eht-sama.

Still, the panic did not settle down. Kouki at this moment stood up and slam the table with a bang. This sound surprised the students and got their attention. When he confirmed that he had everyone's attention, Kouki began to talk.

"Everyone, there is no reason to make so much noise in front of Ishtar-san. He had nothing to do

with it. ...Me, I'm going to fight. The humans of this world are facing a crisis, that is a fact. Knowing that, I cannot ignore their pleas for help. If I was summoned to save humans, we may be able to return after we have saved them. Ishtar-san, how about it?"

"Right, Eht-sama will answer the wishes of the Saviors."

"We all have special powers right? Since I came here I've been feeling this sense of power."

"Yes, that's right. Roughly, each of you have power that is several times higher than the people from this world."

"Then it's okay. I'll fight. I'll save

the people, and then we can all go home. I'll save the world and everyone, you'll see!"

Kouki gripped his fist tightly as he declared this. Vainly, Kouki showed his bright smile that sparkled. At this moment, there was no doubt that his EX charisma was very effective. The students that earlier had an expression of despair began to regain calmness and vigor. Kouki's eyes that shined so brightly, seemed to have found hope in this situation. Half of the school girls sent admiring glances at him.

"I thought you would say something like that. If you were to do it alone, I would worry about you. I'll also fight."

"Ryutaro"

"At this moment that is all we can do. It's not like I hate it, I'll fight too."

"Shizuku"

"Eh, If Shizuku-chan is going, I'll try my best."

"Kaori."

The usual group of 4 agree with Kaori. The rest of the classmates seem to approve and went with the flow. Aiko-sensei tried to argue against it with watery eyes, but against Kouki's display it was useless.

After all, it seemed that everyone was going to participate in the war.

Most likely the classmates did not truly understand what it was meant to go to war, they were just fantasizing it. Most likely they agreed as a mechanism to escape the grim reality they were in, or else their spirits might have caved at the surreal situation. Hajime just observed Ishtar while thinking these things. The priest had a very satisfied expression on his face.

Hajime noticed it though. While Ishtar was giving the explanation, he observed Kouki, he confirmed what reaction they would have to the story. With Kouki's strong sense of justice, it was easy to see his reaction to the tragedy that would befall humans. After he just told them about the ruthlessness of the Devils, Ishtar specifically

emphasized the cruelty. Ishtar probably had good insight. He was wondering who had the most influence in the group.

It was probably natural for someone in the world's largest religion, but what a tricky person. Hajime added Ishtar as someone to be careful of in his head.

* * *

The one waiting for them after the summon was not a priestess or princess, but a really old guy!

Chapter 2: Status Plate

It's explanation time.

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Since they all agreed to participate in the war, the students would have to learn how to fight. Even if they had a lot of extra power and potential, they were all just regular Japanese high school students that were used to peace. Suddenly fighting monsters and devils would not go well.

However, the church and parties involved had already predicted this circumstance, Ishtar said, this

church is located on "God's Mountain" and at the foot is the "Hairihi Kingdom" have arrange for this. The kingdom had a very close relationship with the Church, the god that they worshipped, was the God of Creation Eht and this country was founded by the family of Charm Byrne. The relationship was strong because the church supported this country.

The students went out the front gate of the church. They were going to descend the mountain and visit the Hairihi Kingdom. The church was located at the summit of "God's Mountain". When the majestic church gates opened, there was a sea of clouds there to greet them. Even if it was very high, they did not feel the effects of the high altitude.

Maybe it was because the magic made it a more comfortable living environment. They were fascinated with the grand scene of the blue sky, the sparkling sun, and the sea of clouds.

Ishtar urged them to proceed, while boasting about something. Eventually a circular white pedestal surround by fences came into their view. The beautiful corridor was made of the same material as seen in the cathedral they approached the pedestal and rode on it.

On the pedestal, there were huge magic formations carved into it. Because there was a sea of clouds on the other side of the fence, the students gathered in the center restlessly.

Ishtar started to chant.

"The road that leads, opens for the faithful, "Tendou""

As soon as he said that, the magic formation started to shine. The pedestal started to move smoothly like it was on a ropeway, it moved diagonally towards the ground. Apparently, the "chant" empowered the magic formation engraved into the pedestal. The pedestal was most likely a ropeway. For the students, seeing magic the first time made them excited. When the pedestal broke into the clouds, it caused an uproar.

Eventually, it passed through the clouds and the ground could be seen. They could see a big town

underneath. A huge castle was built into the mountain and the castle town spread from the castle. This was the Hairihi Kingdom. The pedestal lead them to the roof of a very expensive tower that was connected to the royal palace.

Hajime cynically laughed at the production value at display. To descend from the heavens through the sea of clouds, they were being presented as the Chosen of God. They just didn't present the students in a good light, but also the members of the church.

Hajime remembered the prewar Japan days. At that time religion and politics were closely tied together. There was a likelihood that it would lead to trouble later

on. However, this world may be even more strained. After all, this world had the power to touch other worlds, all the while following the "Will of God".

The possibility of them returning, all relied on saving the world on the feelings of their god. While looking over the Capital city and its view becoming clearer, Hajime supressed the uneasiness he felt in his heart. Anyway, he was going to do what he can.

* * *

When they arrived at the Royal Palace, they were ushered into the throne room straight away. They walked through the corridors and could not help but notice the beauty

of the decorations. Along the way, they saw someone dressed up like a knight. they also passed by some maids, everyone was fully uniformed. They looked at the students with awe. The students seemed to be popular or known already.

Hajime seemed uncomfortable so he stuck around at the end of the group. They arrived in front of a set of huge double doors that was designed beautifully, two Soldiers stood at attention on both sides of the door when Ishtar and the party came. Without waiting for a reply, they opened the door.

Ishtar just leisurely entered like it was the natural thing to do. Students filed in feeling a little

uneasy, with the exception of Kouki.

At that point I entered the doorway too. There was a red carpet that led from the entrance all the way to a luxurious throne. On the throne sat a middle aged man that conveyed ambition and dignity. They all stood before the throne and waited. There was a woman next to the throne, that seemed to be the queen. Next to her was a 10 year old boy with blonde hair and blue eyes. A 15-16 year old Bishoujo was next to him, and there was a small 7-8 year old girl that accompanied her. There were people that looked like civil officers on the right side of the carpet, on the left were what looked like to be military officers.

Arriving in front of the throne, Hajime's group stopped, while Ishtar proceeded next to the King. The King lightly kissed the Pope's hand as a sign of respect. Apparently, the Pope was the top dog here. This just confirmed Hajime's theory that the country was run by "God", he sighed inwardly at that.

From there, they introduced themselves. The King's name was Erihido S. B. Hairihi. Luruaria the Queen, Randell the prince, 1st princess Liliana, and 2nd princess Maribelle. After, the prime minister, Knight commander, and other high status people introduced themselves. It seemed that Kaori's charm was universal because the young prince was gazing admiringly

at her.

A banquet was held after and they were able to enjoy this world's cuisine. The appearance of this kingdom was very similar to olden Europeans of Earth. The drink they served was pink in color but glistened like a rainbow, it was very delicious.

The prince seemed to take a liking to Kaori because he was often talking to Kaori, and this got a lot of the class boys fretting. Hajime did not expect much chance for the prince because he was just 10 years old.

In the royal palace, they were introduced to the instructors that would train them. They also would

provided shelter, food, and clothing for all of them. The instructors were handpicked from the Knights, Imperial Court Mages, and much more. This would allow them to develop friendships for the forthcoming war.

After they were finished with the dinner, each person was lead to their own room. Hajime was not the only one to be amazed by the bed that had a canopy over it. Hajime was uncomfortable in such a luxurious room. Still the room allowed for all the strain and stress they got today to melt away. He laid on the bed and he slowly drifted off to sleep.

* * *

Training and lectures began the very next day.

First, each of the students were introduced to a silver plate (12cm x 7 cm). The students looked at the plates curiously. Knight Commander Meld Loggins started to explain.

He thought it was good to have a constant attendance for training, he did not seem to be able to leave it to the students to clear up their mess. Besides Meld, there was the Deputy Leader, who just laughed and said it was going to be alright. Well the Deputy leader may be alright.

"Yoshi, did everyone get one? These plates are called Status Plates. Literally, these plates will show

your stats and status. The plate also serves as an identification card. As long as you have this, you cannot get lost, so don't lose it."

Meld had a very carefree way of speaking. He had an open-hearted character, since they were going to be comrades was he going to speak formally to them. He advised that they talk to each other in a normal manner. They asked them to feel at ease. The students did not feel comfortable addressing their elders in such a nonchalant way.

"There are magic cravings on the plate. I will make a small wound with a needle on your finger, just drip a drop of your blood onto that magic formation. Then the owner of that plate will be registered. If

you say "Status Open", the plate will display you your stats. Ah, have you never heard of such a thing? I didn't know that. This is a kind of artifact from ancient times. "

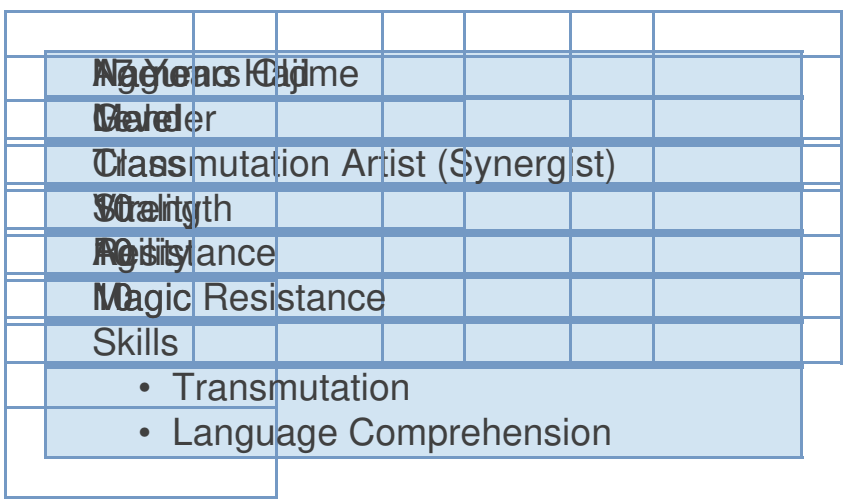
"Artifact?"

Kouki asked the question because he was not familiar with the word.

"The artifact is a powerful tool that cannot be reproduced with modern means. It is said that they were created when God and his family still roamed this land. The status plate is one of the artifacts he left behind that cannot be reproduced. It is usually would be called a national treasure rather than an artifact, but it is distributed in the generally public. Because it was a

very convenient ID card. "

I see, so the student's poked their fingers for their blood and smeared their blood onto the plates to activate the innate magic. The magic formation shined red for an instant. Hajime did the same with his blood and plate.



To see the stats displayed, he couldn't help but feel like he was a character in a game. The other students were looking over their status seriously. The stats were than

explained to them by Meld.

"Did everyone see? Let me explain. First, let go over "level". The level will increase if you get an increase in stats. The max level for a human was 100. In other words, the level shows the base and potential that a human can reach. When you reach level 100, then you have achieved the potential of humans. It is very rare for someone to reach that though."

Unlike games, leveling up does not mean getting extra stats in our case.

"Your stats can be raised by training, magic, or magical tools. Also, someone with a high magic stat allows other stats to increase faster. Although we don't know the

whole detail, it is believe that magical power somehow assists the physical body to improve.

Afterwards, look forward to the gear we selected for you. After all, you are the heroes. The national treasury is being used to supply you!"

From what Meld said, just because you kill a demon or monster does not guarantee your stats will go up. The stats will improve steadily with practice and experience.

"Next we are going to cover "Class". Simply this is the talent you have. The skills you have at the end of your status is directly linked to the class you have. People who have a class are rare. The classes can be

divided into two category: combat classes and non-combat classes. A combat class only shows up in 1 out of 1000 people with classes. Non-combat class only shows up in 1 out of 100 people. Out of those non-combat jobs there are about 1 out of 10 that have an extraordinary class. Most of the people in non-combat classes have manufacturing classes."

Hajime took a look at his stats. Surely his class was "Synergist". He was gifted the ability to "synergize". Well, they were from a stronger world, so naturally he should have higher specs than a normal person from Tortus. Hajime just slightly smirked at that thought. After all he was glad to have talent. However his joy was short lived because

Meld started to explain more about the stats.

"So...let's see everyone's stats. For example, the average person has stats of around 10 at level 1. Well you guys should have several times higher than that. So enviable! Please give reports on what your status plate says. This is so we can develop a training regimen that fits each of you."

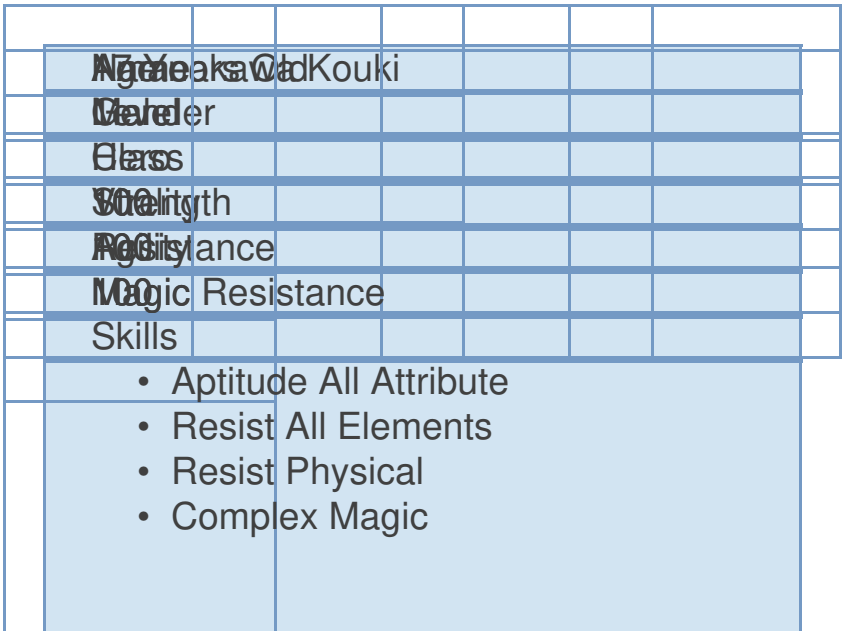
The average person at level 1 has stats around 10. Hajime's stats lined up perfectly to display 10s on all of them. Hajime tilt his head and scratched at it as he broke out in an unpleasant sweat.

(Are? No matter how you look at it, I'm so average...so absolutely

average. Not a cheat. I'm not "TUEEEE"(?) What about everyone else? Maybe it was like this in the beginning.)

Hajime clings to that hope as he looks around at the others. Everyone else had a bright face, nothing like how Hajime's face was like.

Immediately responding to Meld's request, Kouki steps forward to report his status.



- Swordplay
- Herculean Strength
- Quick Movement
- Foresight
- High-speed Magic Recovery
- Sign Perception
- Magic Perception
- Limit Break
- Language Comprehension

The definition of a Cheat.

"Ho, truly a hero. To be at the same stats as me at level 1...I'm a little depressed. Usually a person only has 2 to 3 skills...unbelievable. Very reliable."

"Iya~, Ahaha..."

Kouki scratches his head in embarrassment at Meld's praise. By the way, Meld is level 62. His stats average at around 200, and this is considered top-level in the world

for a human. However, Kouki is already at half his stats at only level 1. At this growth rate, he will overpass him quickly.

By the way, Skill can equate to talent and that is something that cannot be changed. The only exception is "Derivation Skill." This derives from polishing ones skill for many years, this skill is acquired when the person can "break through the wall" to acquire it. It sounds easy, but it has not been done before, it would mean to get a boost in skill level in just one day.

It was thought that only Kouki was special, but the others had superior stats, although not as good as Kouki, they can still be considered cheats. A lot of the classmates had

combat classes too. Hajime just looked at his class name. When trying to imagine his class, it was not possible to see this class in battle. Also, he only had two skills. One of them was the default language comprehension too. Truthfully, he only had one real skill then. Hajime just gave a dry smile at that. Because he had to report to him, Hajime handed his plate to Meld.

Until now, Meld had a great expression from seeing all those special status plates. To be able to have so many strong comrades was a joy. Meld's expression retained its smile as he stated "Huh?" He beat the plate Hajime handed to him to see if it was malfunctioning, and held it up to the light. After staring

at it, he returned the plate to Hajime with an unremarkable expression.

"Ah, this is. If you think about Synergists, it was a crafting class. It's useful if you want to be a blacksmith...."

Meld described the class to Hajime with as much articulation as he could. The boys who did not like Hajime, would jump at opportunity to make fun of Hajime. The class was clearly a non-combat class. All his classmates had combat classes, Hajime would not be helpful in the future battles because of this.

While grinning, Hiyama Daisuke screamed out.

"Oi Oi, Nagumo. It can't possibly be, but did you get a non-combat class? How can a crafting class fight? Meld-san, is this class rare?"

"...Iya, 1 out of every 10 crafting class is one. All the countries employ a lot of them."

"Oi oi, Nagumo~, are you going to fight like that?"

Hiyama throws an arm around Hajime's shoulder, this just annoys Hajime. If you look around at the students, the boys in particular were grinning at his misfortune.

"Sa~, I won't know if I don't try it out."

"Jyaa, let us see your stats. The class isn't that great, but you do have

great stats, right?"

He could already guess the stats from the expression Meld had earlier, he just wanted to bully Hajime even more. He really is a bastard. His three lackeys also joined in on the fun. It was the typical behavior, the lackeys joined in with their leader while he picked on someone. The fact was though, Kaori and Shizuku had very unpleasant expression at the bullying.

If Daisuke liked Kaori, how was he not able to read her disdain for this kind of treatment? Hajime just handed the plate like it was nothing.

When he looked at Hajime's plate,

Hiyama laughed at it. He passed the plate to the others and his followers also joined in on the laughter.

"Fu~Hahahaha, what is this? All of it is so average."

"Kya~hahah, all of it is 10. He is probably weaker than the kids around the block.

"Hi~hahahah, I can't take it! He is going to die! He can't even be a meat shield!"

Kaori started to approach the students that were laughing with an angry expression. However, before she got there, someone let out a voice filled with anger. It was Aiko-sensei.

"Kora-! What are you guys laughing

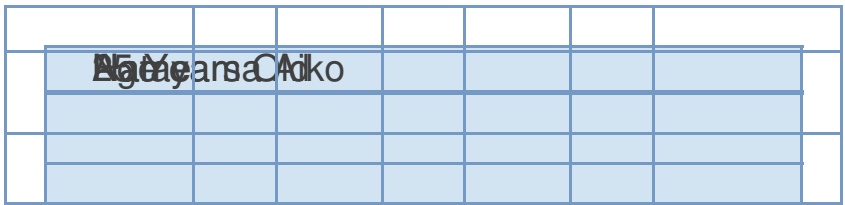
at? Laughing at your fellow classmate is something I will not allow! I will absolutely not allow it! Return Nagumo-kun's plate!"

Aiko-sensei tried to express her anger as well as she could have with her tiny body. The plate was reluctantly returned to Hajime after that.

Aiko-sensei tried to cheer Hajime up by tapping his shoulders.

"Nagumo-kun, don't mind it at all. I'm also a non-combat class. Just like my class, my stats are average. You're not alone, Nagumo-kun."

At that, Hajime was handed Aiko-sensei's plate.



Gender
Class
Strength
Agility
Vitality
Magic Resistance
Skills

- Soil Management,
- Soil Restoration,
- Range Cultivation,
- Growth Stimulation,
- Selective Breeding,
- Plant Appraisal,
- Fertilizer Production,
- Mixture Development,
- Auto Harvest,
- Fermentation Operation,
- Range Temperature Adjustment,
- Farm Barrier,
- Abundant Rain,
- Language Comprehension

Hajime look at the plate with dead-fish eyes.

"Are, what's the matter? Nagumo-kun!" Aiko-sensei started to shake Hajime. Yeah, her stats overall was average, her class was also non-

combat, but if only comparing magic it was hero level. She also had quite a number of skills. Resources were a big problem in wars. Unlike Hajime's class, this was a very good alternative. Aiko-sensei was good enough to be considered a cheat.

This damaged him even more because he thought he was not alone.

"Ara Ara, Ai-chan stop sparkling..."

"Na-Nagumo-kun! Daijoubu?"

Hajime was no longer responding, Shizuku just smiled wryly at it. Kaori runs up anxiously. Aiko just tilts her head in confusion. As usual, Aiko-sensei was somewhat of

an airhead.

Although it did stop the bullying Hajime was going through, but it seemed that the future was going to be hard for Hajime.

* * *

Setting is haphazard.

Possibility of modification is high.

Chapter 3: Bullying the Weakest

Again with the explanations.

* * *

Two weeks has passed since Hajime's condition was known to everyone.

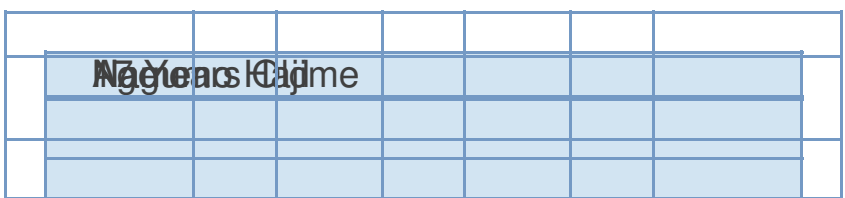
Currently, Hajime was using his break from training to check out the Royal Library. There was a huge book that was titled "An Illustrated Guide to The Monsters of the North Continent" that Hajime read a lot of. Why read such a book? Because even after training for 2 weeks, his talentless showed even more. Since

he was not strong, he decided to study to gain knowledge and wisdom to use.

Hajime looked through the book for quite a while, but eventually sighed and threw it back onto the desk. When the book made a loud noise, the librarian glared at Hajime.

After flinching at the glare, Hajime apologized for the noise. "Hey! There won't be a next time," after he received the stare they let it go. "What are you doing!?" he said to himself, acting like his own Tsukkomi, he sighed at that revelation.

Hajime slowly took out his Status Plate and rested it on his palm.



Level 2
Class Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Vitality 32
Agility 20
Magic 12
Skills
- Transmutation
- Language Comprehension

This was the result of 2 weeks of hard training. What a big increase! I shouldn't try to be my own secret Tsukkomi. By the way, Kouki's...

Name Kouki Tenkawa
Age 17 Years Old
Level 2
Class Hero
Vitality 300
Agility 200
Magic 200
Skills
- Aptitude All Attribute
- Resist All Elements
- Resist Physical
- Complex Magic
- Swordplay
- Herculean Strength
- Quick Movement
- Foresight

- High-speed Magic Recovery
- Sign Perception
- Magic Perception
- Limit Break
- Language Comprehension

His growth rate was 5 times that of Hajime's.

Just as a bonus, Hajime found out that he had no magical aptitude. What happens if you have no magical aptitude? Let's explains the concept of magic in this world.

The magic in Tortus is process where magic from within the body is utilized with an aria and magic formation. The magic will then proceed through the magical formula in the magic formation to achieve the results. There is no way to directly manipulate magic in its base form, so you must correctly set

up the magic formation you want to use.

Also the amount of magic used is directly related to how long the incantation lasts. The amount of formulas and formations in the magic formation also dictates its complexity and scale of effect. all of this is necessary to perform stronger spells. Even to just cast a simple "Fireball", that is present in classic RPGs, it takes a 20 cm diameter magical formation to cast it. The basic concepts are: attribute, power, range, scope, and mana usage all of this is required. There can be other things added to the formula like inductivity and sustain duration to create stronger magic.

However, there are exceptions to

these concepts. These are "aptitudes". With this, some parts of the formula can be omitted. For example, if you have an aptitude with Fire, you can skip writing the attribute section of the magic formula. This omission is done because the person can imagine it. Instead of writing it out, the person can imagine the fire when chanting the spell.

Because most human beings have some kind of aptitude, the 20 cm diameter magic formation is about average. In Hajime cases, because he has no aptitude, he has to add a lot of to his formula to get the same affect. He has to add concepts like: speed, trajectory, ballistic-diffusion rate, and much more. For his case, it would take a 2 m magic circle to

perform that "fireball" spell. This was totally useless in combat.

For magic, there is two ways to engrave the magic formula, into special metals or minerals that allow for reuse or disposable special paper. The former way is more expensive and more powerful than the disposable version. Since the non-paper version are bulky, you can't carry around much of them. Both of the variations have their own advantages and disadvantages. The staff that Ishtar has is the permanent type.

Because of how magic worked, it was not practical in close combat, it would be impossible if the person did not have an aptitude. For a manufacturing class, "Synergist"

was stuck with useless skills that just process or changed the forms of minerals. There was no artifact that helped with the synergy, just gloves that had the synergy magical formula drawn on it. Well, he can make pitfall and protrusions. Hajime had been able to do it on the ground and gradually he could up the scale. Well, it was useless in combat.

All his classmates labeled him useless after they saw his stats and his progress after 2 weeks. Reluctantly, he started to accumulate knowledge. He did not see a bright future ahead for him, this caused him to sigh increasingly each day.

Hajime considered, while looking at

the blue sky from the library window, whether he should take a trip. It was at the very end. Hajime had begun to be lost in wondering where he wanted to go, while he was learning things that he tried so hard to learn these past 2 weeks.

(After all, he wanted to check out the demi-human country. He can't really say he went to another world if he did not experience a kemomimi. However, they were in the "Sea of Trees". Besides the slaves, it was rare to see them outside of the forest.)

To Hajime's knowledge, the Demi-humans were a race that was discriminated. They lived in the Hartzena Forest that spread north and south on the east side of the

continent. They are discriminated against because they do not have any magical power at all.

In ancient times, this world was created by ancient magic that was performed by their god Eht. The magic used in this age is a degrade version of those ancient magic. Therefore, it is believed that magic is a gift from God. Well, that is what the Church of Saints taught everyone.

So, for a race to not have any magical power, it is perceived by humans that they were scorned by God.

Then, how did monster come into being? The monster's are not to be gifted by God, but rather they were

just a natural disaster that occurred. They were only vermin. Hajime was disgusted inwardly by the interpretation people had on them.

The Devils worshipped a different God than the ones that the Church worshipped. This was similar to how the Demi-humans thought too. Devil's all had a very high aptitude for magic. They were able to perform stronger magic with shorter incantations and smaller magic formations than humans.

Humans thought the Devils were their enemies because they worshipped a different God, and discriminate against the unloved Demi-humans. This was what the Church taught. The Devil's felt the same. The Demi-humans, just

wanted to live in peace. All the races were very exclusive.

(If going to the "Sea of Trees" is impossible, maybe I should head for the west sea. If I remember correctly, there is a maritime town called Erisen. If I can't see a Kemomimi, than I want to see a Mermaid. It's a man's romance. He wanted to try the seafood here too.)

The town is said to be off the coast of the western sea and a group of demi-human fishermen are there. This is the only demi-human group that is protected by the Empire. This is because 80% of the seafood the northern continent consumes is provided by them. It's pretty much a straight reason. I wonder where the religious reason to discriminate

them had gone? When he heard the story, Hajime felt like he was a Tsukkomi at that.

Past the western sea is the large Guryuen Desert. In this desert is the great transist oasis the Dukedom of Ancarge and the Mountain of Great Flames. This Mountain of Great Flames is one of the 8 Great Dungeons.

The 8 Great Dungeons, are one of the most dangerous areas in the world. The previously mentioned Hartzena Forest is also one, and another is the Orcus Dungeon which is located southwest of the Hairihi Kingdom. The reason they were considered 3 of the 8 Great Dungeons is because it was recorded in history. The other 5

Great Dungeons have yet to be located.

One of the proposed Great Dungeon is the Raisen Great Canyon, which expands from the north to south of the continent. At the southern hinterlands, where snow and ice are prominent is another rumored Great Dungeon called the Schnee Snowfield.

(After all, the desert is impossible...no other choice but to look for slaves in the Empire. As expected though I have no confidence in treating someone as a slave.)

When mentioning Empire, it refers to the Hersha Empire. This country is a rising country that was formed

by mercenaries that fought a large-scale war against the Devils 300 years ago. The Empire is known for employing mercenaries and is regard as a military centered nation, often adventurers congregated there. Advocates the supremacy of force and is quite the black country.

This Empire thought about the uses for Demi-humans, they concluded that the Demi-humans could be slaves.

The Hersha Empire existed to the east of the Hairihi Kingdom, and between these two countries is the neutral Fyulen Commercial City. The neutral city is an independent entity that does not rely on any country. Using its neutrality, the city was able to exert all of its

management into economic expansion. If there is anything you want, the Commercial City is believed to have it.

(But, if I want to return I can't just run away. Crap, it's almost time for training!)

After all, it was just escapism of his current situation. Since it was almost time for training, Hajime left the library in a hurry. From the library, it was a short distance to the Royal Palace, on the way you can hear and see the bustle in the Royal Capital. There was the voices of children playing and shopkeepers advertising their wares. A distance away you can hear someone scolding a child, this was the picture of a daily peaceful

day.

(Since there does not seem to be a war, can't they just return us.)

Hajime just dreamed of that impossibility. It was just escapism to the depressing times that were ahead.

* * *

When Hajime arrived at the training facility, there were already many students there. Some of them were chatting while others were doing some free practice. It seems like he arrived earlier than he thought. Hajime went to get a western-style sword, that was provided for at the side, and did some free practice while he waited.

Suddenly from behind, something surprised Hajime to cause him to move. By rotating he was able to avoid it but he broke out into a cold sweat at the drawn sword. Hajime looked back while he was frowning, he had a tired expression at this.

There they were, led by Hiyama Daisuke, was the Bastards Four (Hajime made it up). Since their training had started, they have been messing with Hajime whenever possible. They were half the reason why he felt depressed when training. (The other half was his incompetence).

"Yo, Nagumo. What are you doing? Even though you are useless with a sword. Seriously useless."

"Hey, that's so mean, Hiyama. Even if it's the truth~ Gya ha ha ha."

"Why do you even come to train every day? If I was you, I would be too ashamed to come. Hi hi hi!"

"Hey, Daisuke. Since this guy is so pathetic, why don't we help him practice?"

They laughed and grinned at that like it was the funniest thing in the world.

"Hey, you are so nice, Shinji. Well, since I'm so nice too, I'll help out~"

"Good idea. Since I'm super nice, I'll use my precious time to help. You should be thankful, Nagumo~"

Hiyama would take them to an area

where other people would not see, while he acted friendly with Hajime and spoke. The classmates that noticed this would just turn a blind eye to it.

"Iya, I'm fine by myself. You can just leave me to myself."

Hajime tried to refuse gently.

"Hey, when we are going out of our way just to help the useless you, what are you saying? Seriously, I can't have that. You should just stay quiet and thank us for helping you."

As he said that, he struck Hajime in the side. Hajime jerked as a his face turned into a painful expression at the blow. At that point the Bastards Four did not hesitate to get

gradually more violent with him. Although it was unavoidable since it was adolescence boys that suddenly realized they had power. Though it sucked to be the aim of their violence. Hajime had no power to resist them with. He just had to clench his teeth and bare with it.

When they arrived at an unpopulated area of the training facility that no one else had vision of. Hiyama bull rushed Hajime.

"Hey, let's hurry up and start. It's time for fun training."

At this moment Hiyama, Nakano, Saito, and Kondo surrounded Hajime. Hajime just stood there and prepared himself.

"Gua!"

At that moment, he got smashed in the back from behind. Kondo hit Hajime with his sword that still had its sheath. Hajime screamed and fell down face first, but they continued to press.

"Hey, why are you sleeping? Burn~! I command thee Fire, "Kakyu (Fireball)"."

Nakano casted "Fireball". Hajime, who was on floor because of the blow from Kondo, could not get up fast enough from the pain, so he desperately rolled to avoid the spell. However at this time, Saito had completed his spell.

"I command thee Wind, "Kazedama

(Windball)."

The wind hit Hajime directly in the abdomen, and he fell on his back. A "blech" could be heard as Hajime vomited from the blow. The magic circle was a simple one at 10 cm in diameter.

Still there was enough power in that spell to knock out a pro boxer. The artifact was one for high aptitude and high magic power was supplied for by the Kingdom. Normally these would have been used in cooking or just making a breeze.

"Wow, so weak! Hey Nagumo, take this seriously~"

Hiyama kicked Hajime, who was crouching to vomit, in the stomach

as he said this. Hajime did his best to control the feeling of vomiting welling in him.

The lynching, disguised as practice, continued for a while after that. Hajime tighten his jaw to endure the pain, while he thought in vexation to himself how weak he was. Normally at this point, even if you were no match, there would be a counterattack.

However, ever since he was small, whenever he encountered something like this, Hajime was not good at dealing with it and just backed off. Hajime would just tell himself to endure it. He thought it was better than fighting.

While some people may think that

it was very kind of Hajime, but others would think he was pathetic for it. Even Hajime wasn't sure which it was.

The pain was getting unbearable, suddenly, a girls voice filled with anger rang out.

"What are you doing?!"

When the Bastards Four heard that voice, they thought they were busted. They thought that because the voice belong to Kaori, who Hiyama liked. It wasn't just Kaori, the rest of the gang was there.

"Iya, don't get us wrong. We were just helping Nagumo practice."

"Nagumo-kun!"

Kaori totally ignored Hiyama, and Kaori rushed over to Hajime, who was coughing up a fit. The moment she saw Hajime's state, everyone else did not matter, like Hiyama.

"Practice. This is such a one-sided practice."

"Iya, that is..."

"Good excuse. Even if Nagumo can't fight, he is a fellow classmate. Don't do something this again."

"If you have so much free time, go train yourselves."

Not wanting to argue more, Hiyama and the others laughed deceptively and hastily left. Kaori healed Hajime with her healing magic.

"Thank you, Shirasaki-san. You saved me."

Kaori just shakes her head at him while looking teary eyed.

"Have they always been doing this to you? If so, I'll...."

Kaori's face formed into an angry expression and glares at the direction the Bastards Four left in, Hajime stopped her.

"Iya, it's not always like this. I'm fine, so don't worry about it."

"But..."

Hajime smiled at Kaori, who did not seem to be convinced. Reluctantly, Kaori decided to let it go.

"Nagumo-kun, if you need anything, don't hesitate to ask. Kaori will agree to it."

Shizuku said this with a wry smile as she took up Kaori's side. Hajime just said thanks to that. However, someone decided to be a wet blanket with their Hero like quality.

"However, Nagumo should try harder. Being weak does not excuse you from trying to get stronger. If I heard correctly, after practice you just head to the library. If I was you, I would use the free time to get stronger. Nagumo, you should take this more seriously. I think Hiyama and his friends are just trying to correct your non-serious attitude."

How do I interpret that? Hajime

was just stunned by it, Kouki was just a person that believed in the good of others, so he did not see what really was going on. He did not think humans were possible of such evils. He just thought that there was a good reason for them to act that way. When he looked at it, Hajime was possibly the cause. It seemed that was his process of thought.

Kouki did not have any malic or ill intent in his thoughts. He was seriously just trying to advise Hajime. Hajime did not have the energy to try to clear the misunderstanding. He thought it would be useless to argue with someone like Kouki, who had such a strong sense of justice.

Shizuku who understood everything just sighed at that and apologized to Hajime.

"Gomenasai ne? Kouki didn't mean any harm."

"Ahaha, it's okay. I understand."

Hajime replied with a smile. He got up to wipe his dirty clothes.

"Hora, training is going to start. Let's go."

Hajime urges everyone to head back to the training facility. Kaori still looked worried, but Hajime decided to pretend not to notice. As expected, as a man, he did not want to be babied by a girl.

When they reached the facility, a

deep sigh was released because of the events today. The future looked bleak.

* * *

After training finished, usually they would have free time until dinner, but this time Meld held them back to make an announcement. The students wondered what he would say. Meld used a deep voice to announce.

"Tomorrow, as practical training, we will be venturing into the Orcus Dungeon. All the necessary items will be prepared for, the monsters outside the capital are totally different from training so please make note of that. Get ready! For today, just rest. Dismissed."

After saying that, he quickly left.
The student were hustling and bustling at the announcement.
Hajime just looked up into the sky.

(.....Really bleak.)

Chapter 4: A Chat Under the Moonlight

Still not the strongest.

Wanted to convey how it felt for someone that did not get their strength so easily given to them.

* * *

Orcus Dungeon.

This was a large labyrinth that consisted of 100 levels. As one of the 8 Great Dungeons, the lower you go, the stronger the monsters become. Still, this dungeon was a

very popular place for mercenaries and adventurers. This place was also a great training ground for recruits. This is because it was easy to measure the strength of the monsters by the dungeon level. The monsters also have better quality magic stone than the monsters in the wilderness.

The magic stone is the core of a monster and it is this that provides them with powers. The bigger and better quality the stone, the stronger the monster is. These stones are what is used as raw materials to make magic formulas. The magic formation can be drawn to cast the spell, but they can also be drawn with the powder made from the magic stone. Using non-magic stone materials to make the

magic circle diminishes the power by 1/3.

In brief, it was better to use the magic stone to power spells because it was more effective. In addition, a magic stone is used to make magic tools that is used in everyday life. There is a very high demand for these magic stones. Both the military and civilians needed it.

By the way, strong monsters with high quality magic stone can use special magic. Special Magic does not use magical chants or circles to perform that magic. The monsters cannot use a large variety of magic, but they do not require the incantation or circle. This special magic is the reason why monsters

are dangerous.

The students and knights led by Meld arrived at the town, Horlad, that adventurers stayed at before they headed into the Dungeon. They used at an inn that was managed by the Kingdom, where recruits in training stayed at. Hajime, who had not seen a normal room in a long time, dived into the bed. All the rooms were designed for two people but only Hajime got a room to himself. He could be carefree here. He wasn't lonely by himself.

Tomorrow was the day they would challenge the dungeon. This time, they would only challenge the first 10 levels. If it is only that, even someone as weak as Hajime should

be fine in behind cover. Still Hajime wanted to apologize for being a burden. Rather, he was glad to be out of the city...Hajime could not read the atmosphere.

For a while, Hajime read the monster reference book he got from the library. It was still early but he decided to sleep earlier. Hajime had already perfected his sleeping skill in his school life. When he was about to doze off, he heard someone knock on his door. Even if it was still early for Hajime who was used to all nighters in Japan, it was about midnight for Tortus. Wha, was it Hiyama? Hajime was a little worried. However, when he heard the voice, he relaxed.

"Nagumo-kun, are you still awake?

It's me, Shirasaki. Can I bother you for a moment?"

What? For a moment he froze, but after he hurried to the door. He removed the lock and opened the door. Kaori was standing there with a snow-white negligee on.

"Say What??"

"Eh?"

When presented with such a scene, Hajime unexpectedly switched to a Kansai dialect and performed a Tsukkomi. Kaori was speechless because she didn't hear it well. Quickly he gathered himself, he tried not to stare too much at Kaori. Although he didn't have too much interest, he was still an adolescent

boy. The current appearance of Kaori was slightly too stimulating.

"Iya, it's nothing. Eh, what's the matter? Did you have something to tell me?"

"No, I just wanted to talk to you. I wonder if I'm bothering you?"

"Come in."

Most likely, he thought it was about the trip tomorrow, but Kaori quickly shot down his thoughts. The upturned eyes was so explosive. It's super effective! She noticed the open door and invitation.

"Okay."

Without any caution, she entered the room happily. She sat at the

table near the window. Hajime unconsciously prepares the tea while still being slightly confused. Even though it was really just something like a tea bag that imitated black tea. He prepared enough for both, and handed her own. Hajime took the set across from her.

"Thank you."

Kaori took the offered fake tea and tasted it with joy. The moonlight that shone through the window illuminates her. It seemed like there was a halo around her glossy black hair, she looked like an angel. Without any lust, Hajime was fascinated with Kaori's purity. He recovered himself when he heard Kaori place down her cup. Hajime

drank his tea to calm his mind. He choked a little as he drank too fast. How embarrassing.

Kaori giggled at his state. Hajime quickly struck a conversation to quickly hide his embarrassment.

"So, what did you want to talk about? Is it about tomorrow?"

To Hajime's question, Kaori nodded her head. Unlike her smiling face from just a moment ago, she started to brood.

"It's about the trip into the dungeon tomorrow. I want Nagumo-kun to stay here. I will persuade and explain to the instructors and everyone. So, please!"

She leaned over as she pleaded with

Hajime. Hajime was perplexed. Even if Hajime was a burden, wasn't this a little too much?

"Eto, I know I'm a burden...but since I'm already here I don't think I'll be able to just stay put."

"You're wrong. I don't mean you're a burden."

Kaori tried to clear up the misunderstanding. Maybe I was too hasty, she thought. She put her hand on her chest and took a deep breath. It calmed her down a little. She quickly and quietly apologized.

"I just had a very bad feeling. When I was sleeping earlier, I was dreaming and you were there. When I called out to you, you did

not even notice. When I chased you, I never caught up. At the end..."

She seemed afraid to speak the rest. Wanting to hear the rest, Hajime urged her to continue.

"At the end?"

With a jerk, Kaori lifted her head. Hajime saw her teary expression, and her biting her lips.

"You disappeared."

"I see."

They sat in silence for a while. Hajime looks at Kaori, who was still hanging her head. It really was an ominous dream, but it was just a dream. With just that, they wouldn't permit him to stay. If such a thing

was allowed, there would be trouble from the classmates. If such a thing happened, he really would not be welcomed anymore. He had no choice but to go. To reassure Kaori, Hajime started to speak as gently as possible.

"A dream is just a dream, Shirasaki-san. This time we have Meld and his veteran knights to accompany us. A lot of strong people like Kouki are coming with us. Rather, our whole class is amazing. I actually feel sorry for our enemies. I am weak and because I have shown such weakness is probably the reason for your dreams."

Kaori just stared at Hajime with an anxious expression, while he spoke.

"Still....Still...I'm still worried."

"Then."

Hajime was somewhat shy, but he stared straight into Kaori's eyes.

"Will you protect me?"

"Eh?"

He was aware of what he was saying, and as a man saying this to her it ashamed him. His face was already red with shame. In the room that was illuminated by the moonlight. Kaori understood the situation well.

"You are a healer, right Shirasaki-san? Healer was a class that had an innate talent for healing magic. No matter what, even if I get injured,

you can cure me. Will you protect me with this power? If so, I believe I'll be fine."

Kaori just stared at him for a bit. Hajime just endured desperately the shame that he felt, and he kept his eyes from breaking contact with Kaori's. Even though his body was writhing.

The biggest cause of a person's insecurity is the unknown. Kaori right now, was worrying about what could possibly attack Hajime. So, it would be soothing, if they had the confidence to face the unknown that would attack him.

For a while, they stared at each other. The silence was broken when Kaori started to smile.

"You never change, Nagumo-kun."

"?"

Hajime made a doubtful expression as Kaori said that. Kaori laughed at his expression.

"Nagumo-kun, you probably think we first met in high school. I knew you since the second year of middle school."

This revelation caused Hajime to widen his eyes in shock. He quickly searched through his memories, but he couldn't recall the meeting. Hajime groaned as he thought, and this caused Kaori to giggle at him.

"It was a one-sided meeting. The first time I saw you, you were in Dogeza (Prostration). Since you

were in such a position, you did not see me."

"Do-Dogeza!?"

Why did she see him in such an uncool time? His body writhed again, but for a different reason this time. Where and when did she see him in such a position? He frantically searched his memories. Kaori giggled as she saw Hajime make so many comedic faces.

"Yeah, you were surrounded by shady people. Even when they spit at you, poured their drinks on you, or stepped on you, you did not stop. Before long, the left appalled."

"I showed such an unsightly sight..."

Hajime felt like dying a little. It

would have been the same as if she saw him when he was still suffering from his Chunibyo. And it would have to be the worst scene in his dark past. Only a humorless smile came out. The same humorless smile that came out when he found out that his mom had found his hidden Ero doujinshi stash and placed them neatly on his bookshelf.

However, Kaori just gave him a gentle look. One that was free from contempt and ridicule.

"No, it wasn't unsightly. Rather, when I saw you like that, I thought you were a very strong and kind person."

"Ha?"

Hajime couldn't believe what he heard. That's not the kind of impression someone would have, if they saw that. Perhaps, Shirasaki-san had a special fetish for that? Hajime thought it was very rude to imagine such a thing.

"I mean, Nagumo-kun. You did it for the sake of a grandmother and her grandson."

When she said that, Hajime finally remembered something. There was such an incident during his middle school years.

It started when the little boy accidently hit delinquents, and smashed his Takoyaki onto them. The little boy started to cry, the delinquents started to niggle the

grandmother. The grandmother cowered in fear, they were in a very difficult situation.

By chance Hajime was just passing through. When the grandmother started to take out her wallet, his body moved on its own. He had never fought in his life before. He had only practice his Chunibyo Special Moves at home. It couldn't be helped against such opponents, so he performed Dogeza. In public he did it. It was unexpectedly embarrassing for everyone there. He felt like running away. It went as planned and soon the delinquents left.

"Strong people would have solved it easily with violence. Kouki would defeat the person that was causing

the trouble. But I don't think there are many people who would help others even when they were not strong. Especially someone that would prostate themselves for the sake of others. In fact, at that time, I was afraid. I just used the excuse that if I was strong like Shizuku, but I just stood there and did nothing. Just asking someone to save them."

"Shirasaki-san..."

"So, I believe you are the strongest person I know. When I saw you in high school, I was so happy to see you. I wanted to become like you, and get to know you. But you just fell asleep..."

"Ahaha, Sorry."

Hajime was shy and embarrassed when he knew the reason Kaori interacted with him so much. He just laughed wryly at the unexpected high opinion she held for him.

"Therefore, even if I am a little uneasy. I'll make sure you don't do anything crazy in the dungeon. Like when you faced the delinquents."

Kaori looked at Hajime with determination.

"I'll protect you, Nagumo-kun."

Hajime accepted her determination. He looked straight at her, and nodded.

"Thank you."

Immediately after, Hajime wryly laughed. The role of the man and woman was totally reversed. Without doubt, Kaori was playing the hero. While Hajime was playing the damsel in distress. He couldn't help but laugh at the weird situation.

They chatted for a few moments, then Kaori returned to her room. While Hajime was laying on the bed, he thought over things. He wanted to find something he could be useful for. Hajime wanted to rid himself of his incompetence. It did not sit so well with him, that he was so dependent on others. Hajime fell asleep with renewed determination in mind.

* * *

Nobody noticed the person that was staring as Kaori left Hajime's room. The person just had an ugly distorted expression on their face.

Chapter 5: Trap

Before I knew it, I was on the ranking system.

How scary. I wonder if I can still write leisurely at that...

Still, I am happy. Thank you for reading.

* * *

Currently, Hajime and party is gathered around the square just in front of the Orcus Dungeon entrance.

For Hajime, he imagined a dark gloomy entrance, but the entrance looked like the entrance to a

museum, heck it even had a reception desk for the entrance. There was a smiling Onee-san in uniform that was checking people who entered and left the dungeon. Apparently, this was the place people checked in with their Status Plate. Using those figures, they could record who perished in the dungeon. With the war nearing, they did not want too many casualties.

In the square near the entrance, there were many stalls there lined up. The shops were competing against each other. It was like a festival. This place was a popular area to earn a good income because people naturally gathered here. The superficial levels of the Dungeon was popular. There were many

people who wanted to challenge the Dungeon, some took it seriously while others just fooled around with their lives. There seemed to be a lot of criminal activity in the back alley near the Dungeon. The country, with help from the adventurer guild, have establish operations and facilities to limit the crimes because of the pending war. This was very useful because you can buy and sell material here, and it was close to the Dungeon.

While the class was looking around like some bumpkins, they followed the duck-like mount behind Meld.

* * *

The inside of the Dungeon was totally different to the bustling of

the outside. There is not much ambient light, but in front was a passage that emitted light. The passage was about 5 m high and wide, it was possible to see to some extent even without any magical light or torches. Special green stones, that were buried in the walls, emitted light to brighten the dungeon. Orcus Dungeon seemed like it had a huge vein of these green stones.

The party organized into rank and progressed forward. For a while, nothing of interest happened till they advanced into a hall. The hall was dome shaped and the ceiling looked to be around 7-8 m high. Gray fluffy balls gushed out from the cervices of the wall.

"Okay, Kouki and group step forward. Anyone else fall back! We will take shifts for the frontline. Get ready! These monsters are called Ratmen. They are that strong or dangerous, but they are quick. Take it steadily."

Just like he said, the Ratmen jumped at them with speedily. Their scarlet eyes shined eerily between their gray hair. Their name suited them. Ratmen were bipedal and had a muscular upper body, and they had mouse-like features. Only their chest and abdomen, which had an 8 pack, was not covered in hair. It was like they were showing off their abs.

The frontline was comprised of Kouki and his party. When Shizuku, who was at the front, saw the

enemy her face stiffen up. The Ratmen gave off a creepy feeling. Kouki, Shizuku, and Ryutaro intercepted the charging Ratmen. Meanwhile, two girls that were close to Kaori started to chant. The girls were Nakamura Eri the meganekko, and Taniguchi Suzu the energetic loli. They prepare to invoke their magic. They stayed in the formation they were taught.

Kouki wielded his white shining bastard sword so quickly that it was hard to see the motions, he quickly made short work of a few enemies. His sword was one of the artifacts that the Kingdom gave to him, the "Holy Sword". The sword had a light attribute. Any enemies caught in the light, that the sword produces, weakens and it also automatically

strengthens its wielder. Even if it is "Holy", it has such "dirty" abilities.

Ryutaro's class was a "Fist Fighter", so he used gauntlets and shin guards as his equipment. These were also artifacts, and they could cause shockwaves. They were also believed to be unbreakable. Ryutaro takes a imposing stance and does not let any enemy pass by him with carefully placed kicks and punches. Though he had no shield, he acted like a heavy armored tank.

Shizuku, who was like a Samurai girl, with her "Swordswoman" class and sword that was like the mixture of a Shamshir and a Katana. Took a battojutsu stance and drew her sword. All the enemies were cut in an instant. The draw was so refined,

that the knights were dazzled by it.

While the other students were fascinated by Kouki's party's battle, a chant resounded.

"""Swirling Dark Flames, Incinerate My Enemies, Return them to the Earth as Ashes, "Spiral Flame"."""

Three people simultaneously casted it, and three spiraling flames engulfed the Ratmen. The Ratmen gave out a death cry as the flames turned them to ashes.

They noticed that all the Ratmen were wiped out. The other students didn't get a turn. It seemed like that the enemies on the first level were too weak for Kouki's party.

"Yeah, Good Job! Next time you

guys try it, don't lower your guard though."

Meld warned not to let up, but he smiled at the prowess the students showed. However, the tension from their first experience at encountering monsters in a dungeon could not be stopped. The students faces broke out into smiles. Meld just shrugged his shoulders at their reactions.

"Although this is a training exercise, don't forget to keep in mind about Magic Stones. Since it's obviously overkill."

At Meld's words the people in Kaori's group that casted the spell blushed.

There were no particular problems from there, they repeated battles in the same manner. Everything was going well in the lower levels. Eventually, they arrived at the 20th floor, which is the mark of a first-class adventurer. The highest level explored was the 65th floor for Orcus Dungeon. This achievement was done by adventurers over 100 years ago. Getting to the 40th level is considered Elite first-class. Those who passed the 20th level was considered first-class. Since all the students were cheats, they easily broke through to the 20th level, even if they did not have much experience.

Traps were the scariest feature of a Dungeon. In some instances, the traps were lethal. There was

something called Fair Scope for the lower levels. This is a gadget that detected traps by feeling flow of magic. Because most traps in a dungeon use magic, the Fair Scope can detect more than 80% of traps. The detecting range is somewhat narrow, so experience or information was needed to progress smoothly.

Therefore, they were able to quickly breeze through the floors. This was mainly because of how earnestly the Knights guided them. Meld especially mentioned to them that if they did not know the layout, check for the traps. If they were not sure if traps were around, move with caution.

"All right, you guys. From this point

on, not only will there be other types of demons but they will work together to attack us. Do not get careless just because it had been easy so far! After we clear the 20th level, it will be it for today! Get fired up!"

Meld's undertone in his message resounds with everyone. Up to this point, Hajime had not done anything in particular. Once, he practiced on a monster that the knights had weakened. He created a pitfall for the monster to fall into, and stabbed it with a sword. Until now, he had only defeated one dog-like monster.

No one wanted him in their party. Basically, he just stood behind the cover provided by the knights. It

was pretty pathetic. However, by repeatedly using his "Synergy" skill in combat he could improve his magical power. His magical power raised by 2 points, it seemed actual combat was useful.

(Still, I'm totally a parasite player....)

Again, a weakened monster was thrown to Hajime by the Knight that weakened it. When it approached, Hajime transmuted the ground and breathed out a sigh. With it restrained, Hajime swung his sword to strike down the monster.

(Well, it seems like my precision with transmutation has gone up. Let's do our best step-by-step.)

He consumed a magic replenishing pill, as he wiped the sweat of his brow. Hajime had not noticed, but there were some knights that were impressed with him.

The knight did not expect anything from him in the beginning. In battle however he dared to fight against the demons and do not just stand around. Of course, weakened monsters.

For the knights, they thought Hajime would fight using his barely used sword. Hajime choose to use his transmutation to seal their movements. He brought down decisive blows on the monsters with a reliably strategy that the Knights had never seen before. "Synergist" was considered as a

crafting class. They had never thought of using the transmutation skill like that in combat.

Since he did not have anything else, Hajime thought about transmuting his weapon. He thought that if he could manipulate minerals, why can't he manipulate the ground? Since he was surrounded by so many strong people, and him just defeating a few, he felt useless. This was his first public exhibition of his tactic. When his impotence was shown in the combat training in the capital, he came up with this tactic.

They stopped for a short rest. He looked forward and met eyes with Kaori. She looked towards Hajime and smiled at him. Kaori seemed to be keeping an eye on him after last

night's declaration to "protect" him. This caused Hajime to be embarrassed and he broke eye contact. Her expression sulked slightly at that. Shizuku who had been observing what was going on with a wry smile on her face, she asked in a small voice.

"Kaori, why are you two constantly looking at each other? You can't be considering a romantic comedy in the Dungeon, no time for that."

Kaori blushed at the teasing. She refuted Shizuku angrily.

"Mou, Shizuku-chan. Don't say strange things. I was just wondering if Nagumo-kun was alright. That's it!"

Shizuku knew it wasn't like that, but she kept her mouth shut. She didn't want to say anything that might upset her more. Though she couldn't hide the laughter in her eyes. Kaori saw that and just sulked at it.

Hajime just side glance at their state, suddenly he felt a gaze. The unpleasant gaze was full with negative emotions and seemed to be glued to him. Hajime was not unfamiliar with such stares in the classroom, but this was feeling could not compare, it was so grave.

It was not the first time today that he felt that gaze. Since the morning he had felt this stare. When he tried to locate the stare, it would disappear. Hajime was tired of it,

after having it repeated so many times.

(I wonder what it is...did I do something? I thought I was doing my best even if I was incompetent. I wonder if that's the cause? I'm not getting arrogant! Target?)

Hajime breathed out a deep sigh. He started to feel the bad feelings Kaori mentioned.

The party searches the 20th level. Each level of the Dungeon was several kilometers in each direction. It would take dozens of people several months to map out an unknown level. 47 levels have been mapped properly, so it was not that easy to get lost. There was not a big worry of getting caught in a trap.

The innermost room of the 20th level had a very complicated geographical feature. The walls were protruding like a stalactite cave and icicles formed around the room. The stairs to the 21st floor was just ahead of this room. If they reached that point, the training would be done for the day. In ancient times they were able to wield transportation type magic, but at the current age such means was impossible. They must head back the old fashion way. The party relaxed slightly, since the walls were protruding they had to advance in a column.

After a bit, Kouki's party and Meld that was in the front stopped. The classmates who were keen, got into their fighting stance.

"They're camouflage!. Make sure to pay attention to your surroundings!"

Meld advised them. The wall suddenly rose and discolored a bit. The body that was camouflaged was now dark brown, and they stood on 2 legs. It raised its chest and started to pound on it like a drum. When they took a good look at it, it was a gorilla-like demon with a camouflage ability.

"Rockmounts! Be careful of their arms, they are strong!"

Meld yelled echoed in the cave-like room. Kouki's party went to engage them. Ryutaro was able to reflect the blow that came from a Rockmount. Kouki and Shizuku try to surround the beast. They could

not position themselves because the terrain layout was too obstructive.

When the Rockmount felt that he could not pass by Ryutaro, it withdraw a bit and inhaled a deep breath.

"GuGaGaGaaaaa------!!""

The intense roar vibrated the whole room.

"Gu!?"

"Uwa!?"

"Kya!?"

A shock ran through their bodies, it did not damage them, but it froze them. This was Rockmount's

Special Magic "Intimidating Roar". The roar carried the magic that caused the temporary paralysis.

Kouki's vanguard took the roar almost point-blank, this caused them to freeze momentarily. The Rockmount took this gap in defense to attack, it lifted a boulder and threw it at Kaori's rear guard. A stunning shot-put form was executed by it. The rock flew towards Kaori, and the frozen vanguard could not move to stop it.

Kaori and her partners ready the magic wands they had, to intercept the boulder. There was not enough room to dodge it. However, the moment they were going to activate their magic, all of them involuntarily were stunned at the

sight before them.

The boulder that was thrown was another Rockmount. Nearing Kaori's group, it did a stunning rotation and expanded its arms. It's appearance was like a Rune Diver. A voice saying "Ka-o-ri-chan~!" could almost be heard. Strangely, its eyes were bloodshot and its breathing was rough. Kaori, Eri, and Susu unintentionally screamed and stopped their magic.

"Hey! What are you doing in a battle"

In a hurry, Meld went to slay the Rockmount that was still in the dive. The girls apologized, but the bad feeling was still there. Their face had paled.

There a person that got mad at such a situation. Our very own mass of justice, Amanokawa Kouki.

"Bastard....You dare treat them like that...I won't forgive you!"

Kouki seemed to have misunderstood why the girls were pale and feeling bad, he thought they were afraid of their impending death. To frighten girls like that! Indescribably, small signs of anger surfaced on Kouki. His "Holy Sword" seemed to shine in response to his feelings.

"Myriad of Soaring Wings, Reach the Heavens, "Soaring Flash""

"Ah, this fool!"

Ignoring Meld's voice, Kouki

brandished his sword over his head and swung down in one motion. His chant had made the sword emit an intense light, the slash released the light. Drawing a curve, the light bisected the Rockmount without encountering any resistance. The blade of light continued on until it destroyed the back wall.

Debris lightly fell from the damaged wall. Kouki exhaled and gave the girls a sparkling smile. He had defeated the monster that scared them. It's alright now! About to give credit to his voice, he was approached by a smiling Meld who smack him.

"Ow!?"

"You fool. I understand how you

feel, but you shouldn't use such a technique in such a narrow place. If it collapse, what are you going to do?"

At Meld's rebuke, he choked. Kouki tried to apologize. The girls approached him and gave him a strained smile to try to comfort him.

At that moment, the collapsed wall caught Kaori's attention.

"What is that? It's sparkling."

Everyone looked at the wall Kaori was mentioning. There blooming on the wall were minerals that radiated pale light. It was like a crystal covered in indicolite. The girls were enchanted by the

beautiful sight of the crystals.

"Oh, that's Grantz Crystal. A one this big in size is rare."

When talking about Grantz Crystal, it was like an ore that was like a jewel. The crystal did not have any special effects, but it's cool and sparkling appearance is popular among the ladyship. Rings, earrings, pendants, and other jewelry have it set into them and it's very well received. The jewel is one of the top 3 chooses for proposal rings.

"Lovely..."

Enchanted, Kaori's cheeks blushed. Hajime and Shizuku were the only ones who noticed this.

"If that's the case, I'll retrieve it!"

The one who announced that and abruptly moved toward it was Hiyama. He approached the wall and quickly reached towards the crystal. Meld panicked at that.

"Kora! Don't just do what you want! We haven't confirmed if it's safe!"

Hiyama pretended not to hear and finally arrived in front of the crystal. Meld chased after Hiyama to stop him. At that moment, one of the knight finished his analysis with the Fair Scope. He paled at the result.

"Commander! It's a trap!"

"tsu!?"

However their warnings came too late. The moment Hiyama touched

the Grantz Crystal, magic started to spread from the crystal. The trap was set for people who became so fascinated with the crystal that they would touch it carelessly. There's a good story about this. It's the way of the world.

In a blink of an eye, the magic circle spread throughout the whole room, and it gradually shined brighter. It was like a replication of the magic that summoned them.

"Withdraw! Get out of this room this instant!"

At Meld's insistence, everyone started to clear the room in a hurry, but they weren't fast enough. When the light filled the room, everyone momentary felt a floating

sensation. The students felt the change in atmosphere. They were slammed onto the ground with a thud.

With the increasing pain on his butt caused by the fall, Hajime looked at the surrounding. Same as Hajime, his classmates fell on their backside. Meld, the knights, and Kouki's party quickly stood up and observed their surroundings. Seems like the earlier magic was a transportation type magic. Since such magic was not possible with current magic, it was most likely an ancient magic.

They were all transferred onto a huge bridge made of stone. Approximately it was 100 m in length. The ceiling looked to be

about 20 m. There was no river passing by underneath the bridge, because of the darkness nothing else could be seen. It felt like there were in an abyss.

The width of the bridge was about 10 m, but there were not even handrails. If you slipped there would be nothing to grab onto, and you would fall headfirst. The group was right in the middle of the bridge. On both sides of the bridge, they could see a passage that led to a stairway that ascended to the upper level.

When he confirmed it, Meld issued out orders with a grim expression.

"You guys, get up there immediately, go towards the stairs.

Hurry!"

Quickly the students moved. However, a trap in a dungeon was not going to be so easy, the retreat wasn't that easy. Monsters emerged from the magic circles that appeared on both sides of the bridge. On one side was a huge monster. The other had a large amount of monsters.

Meld started at the huge demon and just whispered...

"No way....a Behemoth."

Chapter 6: Behemoth

[Traum is German for Dream]

* * *

On both sides of the bridge, a magical formation that emitted crimson light appeared. The magic circle on the aisle side is close to 10 m. The one on the stairs side is around 1 m, but the numbers are numerous.

From the smaller countless magic circles came monsters that were sword-toting skeletons, these were called "Traum Soldier". Their eyes were the same color as the magic

circle, it sparkled and shine while they looked around. 100 Traum Soldier have already been summoned and yet the numbers were still increasing.

Even though there were so many skeleton Soldiers on this side, the other side's monster was what caused Hajime's danger sense to go haywire. From the 10 m magical circle, a quad pedal demon 10 m long with some sort of helmet on its head, spawned from it. If compared to any animal Hajime knew of, the closest would be a Triceratops. However, it's eyes shone crimson, while percussing it's sharp claws and fangs, flames gathered around the horns on its helmet.

Meld just whispered out

"Behemoth". At that moment, the Behemoth took a deep breath and let out a deafening roar.

"Gurua~a~a~aaaaa!!"

"Tsu!?"

The roar caused Meld's senses to return, he quickly started to issue commands to everyone.

"Alan! Lead the students to the stair and break through those Traum Soldiers! Kyle, Ivan, Gale! I need you guys to extend the best barriers you can! Stop it! Kouki, hurry and get to the stairs!"

"Wait a moment, Meld-san! We'll help! That dinosaur-like monster is the most dangerous!? We'll..."

"Fool! That's a real Behemoth, at your current strength it's impossible! It's a 65th level demon. Once a long time ago, the "Strongest" known adventurer battled it and were unable to defeat it. Hurry up and go! I can't let you guys die!"

Even Meld's expression faltered for a moment at the daunting monster in front of him. "I can't just abandon you guys!" was Kouki's response as he stood his ground. At the moment when Meld tried to reason with Kouki to retreat, the Behemoth roared and started to charge at them. At this rate, the students who were retreating would get trampled to death.

To prevent it, the strongest of

Haihiri's military spawned multiple full powered barriers.

"""Repel all Malice and Enmity, Absolute Providence from the Son of God, Herein a Sanctuary, You Shall Not Pass, "Absolute Virtue""""

The magical formula for this spell was engraved in the highest quality paper 2 m wide. The incantation having 4 phrases to activate it. 3 of the Warrior's casted it simultaneously. A barrier manifested that could stop anything for 1 minute. The hemispherical barrier shined pure-white as it stop the Behemoth's charge.

The moment the Behemoth clashed with the barrier, a shockwave erupted from between them. The

whole bridge shook at the shockwave, and everything around the Behemoth's feet were pulverized. The retreating students scream and tumbled at the artificial quake.

Traum Soldier were monsters that showed up on the 38th level. They were heads above anything they encountered so far. The students panicked as they were sandwiched by a monstrous demon in the back and an eerie army of skeletons in the front.

They advanced reckless, without giving care to keeping rank, and aimed for the stairs. Alan, tried to calm them down desperately, no one listed because of the imminent terror. One of the school girls was

pushed from behind and fell down. She groaned as she lifted her head to see before her a Traum soldier brandishing it's sword.

"Ah."

The soldier swung it's sword down towards her.

She thought she was going to die at that moment, but suddenly the Traum Solider feet were up heaved. Losing its balance the trajectory of the blade missed the girl and struck the ground instead. Furthermore, the upheaval continued like a wave towards the end of the bridge, tripping up many Traum Soldiers along the way. This caused some of the Soldiers to fall into the abyss.

2 m off of the edge of the bridge in a crouched position was Hajime as he exhaled heavily. He was continuously transmuting the ground. Like a ground slide, the monsters on the bridge were guided off into the abyss. Unaware, his proficiency in transmuting got better because he constantly used it. The range of his transmuting also seemed to have increased.

While drinking a mana potion, Hajime quickly approached the girl that fell down. He helped the girl up. Hajime spoke to the still stunned girl with a smile.

"Hurry Forward. It's alright, if you calm down these skeletons are nothing. Because except for me, everyone else is a cheat!"

Hajime pat her on the back with full confidence, the next moment she uttered a quick energetic "Thank you".

Hajime had ruined the surrounding Traum Soldiers' footing and had them detained, he took that moment to survey the battlefield. Everyone was in such a panic that they were fighting without any thought and looked so sloppy. At this rate, it was highly likely that someone would die. Alan is still trying to organize them, but it is not going well. More reinforcements came for the Traum Soldiers through the new magic circles.

"We need a strong leader to guide us, Amanokawa-kun!"

Hajime started to sprint towards Kouki's party.

Behemoth was still repeatedly charging the barrier. A powerful shockwave was produced everything it collided with the barrier, the bridge groaned at the pressure. There were already cracks in the barrier and it was only a matter of time before it gave. Meld had joined in the reinforcement of the barrier but it was like adding a drop into a bucket.

"Ah, Crap! It won't hold for much longer! Kouki, hurry and retreat! You guys go too!"

"No! I will not abandon you guys! We will all survive this!"

"Ku, to be so egotistical at this moment..."

Meld just displayed a sour face at their conversation. In such a narrow space, it would be very difficult to avoid the Behemoth's rush. Therefore, the best option was to withdraw because without the barrier they would be trampled. Such a subtle perception of the situation could only come with experience, it was highly unlike for Kouki and his party to have such an insight.

Meld was urging than to withdraw, but with a heavily summarized explanation on why. Kouki did not take his advise and refused to "abandon" them. Also from the look in Kouki's eyes he wanted to

challenge the Behemoth.

It could be attributed to his adolescent mind. He was overestimating himself, because he had so much praise showered onto him.

"Kouki! Listen to what Meld is saying and retreat!"

Shizuku, who understood the situation, grabbed Kouki's arm in remonstration.

"This is not the first time Kouki is unreasonable! I'll back you up!"

"Thanks, Ryutaro!"

Ryutaro's statement just fueled Kouki's attitude even more. Shizuku clicked her tongue at that.

"Don't get intoxicated with the situation! Bakamono!"

"Shizuku-chan"

Kaori is worried for the irritated Shizuku.

A boy jumped out in front of Kouki.

"Amanokawa-kun"

"Na-Nagumo!?"

"Nagumo-kun!?"

Everyone was surprised by how serious Hajime was.

"Hurry and retreat! You have to help everyone!"

"Why so sudden? What are you

even doing in a place like this? This is not a place you should be at! Just leave this to us, Nagumo...."

"Is this the situation to say such a thing?"

Hajime showed such unexpected force in his words that Kouki stopped his rebuke. Until now, they had never heard Hajime use such a harsh tone. He had always presented himself with a smile and now seeing such an image was shocking.

"Can you not see what is going on? Everyone is in a panic, because their leader is missing!"

Hajime pointed towards the students while one hand grabbed

onto Kouki's chest. In the direction he pointed at, there was his confused classmates being surrounded by Traum Soldiers. The training that was drilled into them was nowhere to be seen, they fought willy nilly. Since they were so inefficient they were being overwhelmed by the reinforcements. Although their high stats were protecting them for now, soon it would not matter.

"We need a blow that can break through them! A power to erase the fear in everyone's hearts! And it's you who has such a power! Don't just look in front of you, look at what's going on behind you too!"

Stunned at seeing his classmates in chaos, the shaking Kouki nodded

his head.

"I understand! I'll go immediately. Sorry, Meld-san!

"Go!"

The moment Meld looked back at Kouki's agreement to retreat, the barrier finally fell to the Behemoth's onslaught. The raging shockwave caused by the destruction of the barrier, was shooting straight for Hajime and the others. Hajime quickly stepped forward and transmuted a wall, but it was easily brushed aside. It seemed he had weakened it. Dust whirled as the Behemoth bellowed out a roar.

On the ground was Meld and three

of his knights groaning. Their body seemed to have taken damage from the shockwave, they were unable to move. Kouki and his party had fallen over, but quickly they recovered. Hajime's wall had been useful for those behind Meld.

"Ryutaro, Shizuku can you buy me some time?"

Though they were in some pain, the two of them pressed forward at Kouki's request. Since Meld had been disabled, it was up to them to do something.

"I'll do what I can!"

"Somehow, I'll do it!"

Both of them rushed the Behemoth.

"Kaori, start healing Meld and his men."

"Okay."

Kaori quickly went to work. Hajime was already beside Meld. He quickly created a stone wall to prevent the affects of battle from reaching them. Although it seemed useless when looking at the battle, it was better than nothing.

Kouki at the moment had been gathering himself and chanting to perform his best skill.

"Divine will! Perish all evils with your light! The breath of God! Blow away the ominous clouds and purify this world! The mercy of God! Forgive all sins with this strike!

"Heaven's Might"!"

An aurora gushed out from the "Holy Sword" after the chant. The skill was similar to the "Soaring Flash", but it's power was on a completely different level. It paved a gouge in the bridge as it shot towards the Behemoth, shaking the bridge with its might. After the chant, Ryutaro and Shizuku had already cleared out. However, after fighting the Behemoth they were in a tattered state. To suffer such a considerable amount of damage in such a short time.

The bombardment of light hit the Behemoth directly. Light filled the area where the spell had impacted with the demon. An earthquake resounded in the bridge, and cracks

spawned all over it.

"If it's this....Ha-a Ha-a"

"Did that do it?"

"I hope so."

Ryutaro and Shizuku returned to Kouki's side. Kouki breathed heavily after using such an enormous amount of magic. That skill earlier, was his trump card. Most of his magic was used to fuel it. Kaori had finished treating the fallen Soldiers and Meld was actively trying to stand up.

When the light and dust settled down....

There it was, an unscathed Behemoth.

The beast sent a death glare at Kouki and growled. It raised its head, there was a high pitch then it's horns started to glow red hot. Magma, that word described perfectly what the Behemoth's helmet looked like.

"Don't just stand there! Move!"

Meld's voice helped the them regain their senses and they started to move. The Behemoth soon rushed them with his newly powered helmet. Like a falling meteorite the Behemoth fell helmet first towards Kouki.

Even if they were able to avoid it by jumping aside, the shockwave caused by the impact still blew them away. When they stopped

rolling, they had wounds all over their bodies. Meld, who finally regained his movement, rushes over. The other knights were still being treated by Kaori. Bracing itself, the Behemoth worked to pull out his stuck head.

"Can you guys move?"

All he got in response were groans. They were probably paralyzed again by the shockwave caused by the falling Behemoth. The damage to the internal organs seemed to be significant.

Meld called out to Kaori. When he was looking for Kaori, Meld's sight caught hold of Hajime.

"Bozu! Take Kaori, Carry Kouki and

retreat!"

For Meld who directed such instructions to Hajime, He would only be able to carry Kouki. That instruction indicated that, no one else would be able to escape. Meld clenched his teeth and prepared his shield. He had chosen to risk his life in this dangerous situation to hold back the beast.

At such a desperate moment for Meld, Hajime made a suggestion. This method may be the only way that everyone would be saved. However, the chance of it succeeding was very low. Hajime would also be in the most dangerous position.

Meld hesitated, but the Behemoth

was already combat ready. It's helmet started to sizzle red hot. They had no time.

"Are you going to do it?"

"I'll do it!"

Meld could easily see the resolute gaze Hajime had, and he couldn't help himself from smiling.

"I can't believe that I'll entrust it up to you, I'll surely save you. Leave it to you!"

"Hai!"

Meld headed towards the Behemoth at that. He released a simple magic to provoke it. The Behemoth seemed to have a habit of targeting anyone who was attacking him at

the moment. Man and Beast gazed at each other.

When the helmet was finally enflamed it charged then leapt. Meld stood there poised, intending to provoke it till the last moment. At that moment, a small incantation could be heard.

"Blow "Wind Wall"!"

He back stepped at the same time as he chanted. Like a comet, the Behemoth landed at the area where Meld was previously stationed at. The "Wind Wall" was able to deflect the shockwave and debris from the impact. Since it was just a simple attack, he was able to avoid it. He would have been totally annihilated if he was protecting Kouki.

Again, the Behemoth's head was stuck after the attack. Hajime advanced at this, but the remnants of the blazing heat burns Hajime. He endured the pain and he started to chant. It couldn't really be considered a chant because he just called out the spell's name.

"Transmute."

The Behemoth's movement to extract it's head from the stone was stopped because the surrounding stone buried its head. No matter how much stone it destroyed to free itself, Hajime just repaired it with his transmuting. Bracing it's legs, the Behemoth was going to forcefully free itself, but Hajime transmuted around the foot this time. He constantly harden and

transmuted the stone and finally he sunk the beast 1 m into stone. The Behemoth's power was so terrifying that if he let up for just a moment, cracks would from in the formation and it would try to slip out. In order to prevent this Hajime did not let up on his continuous transmuting. He observed the Behemoth struggling to get free with its head buried underground. For anyone else it would have looked very silly.

In the meantime, Kaori and the recovered knights were gathered and carried Kouki's party back. On the side with the Traum Soldiers, the students had regained some of their composure and started to cooperate with each other. The reason for the recovery was because of the girl Hajime saved earlier. A

simple contribution from Hajime.

"Wait! There is still Nagumo-kun."

Kaori protested to Meld who was withdrawing.

"This is his plan! We are going to clear the Soldiers and make a safety zone for ourselves, and then we will bombard the beast with magic! Of course, we will allow him to retreat too! He can retreat when our magic barrage holds that beast in place, then we can retreat to the upper level."

"Then, I'll stay and help him!"

"Not possible! Your healing is needed to back up Kouki as we retreat!"

"But!"

Meld shouted at the protesting Kaori.

"Don't let his effort be in vain!"

"Tsu!?"

Including Meld, the other one with the highest power was without a doubt Kouki. If she did not use her healing magic effectively, they may eventually lack the power to stop the Behemoth. That is why it is necessary for her to join the retreating group. They did not have to time to stop and heal with other slower means, and if they were not fast enough Hajime will run out of mana to trap the Behemoth.

"Breath of Heaven, Fill to the brim,

Purify and Heal, "Heaven's Blessing"!"

Even if she had a face like she wanted to cry, she continued with her incantation. A pale light engulfed Kouki. The restorative property of her magic healed his body of injuries at the same time it enveloped him. Meld placed a hand on Kaori's shoulder and nodded, and she nodded back. Again, Kaori turned around to look at the scene of Hajime transmuting against the Behemoth. All of them started to retreat after that.

The numbers of the Traum Soldier was still increasing. Currently, they numbered around 200. They all filled up the stair side of the bridge. But in a sense it might be a good

thing. If a gap was present, the students would try to push through, but their lack of experience would lead them into getting surrounded and slaughtered. Actual this was a good number for the students who were having trouble with the 100 earlier.

Lucky, there had not been a single death, it was thanks to the earnest knights who protected them. It was not an exaggeration to say that they were desperately covering the students' lives. The expense came in the form of all the wounds they had acquired.

If they lost the knights' support, for the increasing number of students who were panicking and did not know the magic that caused the

increasing monsters, they would fall apart in minutes.

Despair struck the students who realized it. The group that cooperated with the girl that Hajime saved earlier, even though they fought bravely their face conveyed that they were at their limits. When they thought it was finished...

"Soaring Flash!"

A pure-white slash exploded right through the ranks of Traum Soldiers. The Soldiers near the side edges of the bridge was blown into the abyss. After the slash thought, the remaining Soldiers filled in the gap that was created by the skill. They surely saw the stair that led to

the upper level though. The wished to see it but it had been covered by the sea of swords.

"Everyone! Don't give up, I'll open up a path!"

He spewed those lines as the "Soaring Flash" tore through the enemies. The students energized at the charisma Kouki displayed.

"What have you guys been doing this whole time? Remember your training, and start cooperating with each other! Fools!"

The leader everyone relied on released a skill that was not inferior to "Soaring Flash" at the enemies. The reliably feeling returned to his voice. His body filled with power

and his mind cleared. Kaori's magic was doing their job, the magic to calm the mind. The magic was just a relaxation magic but combined with Kouki's performance it was super effective.

Anyone with an aptitude for healing started to heal everyone. The people with high aptitude for magic made up the rear guard, they started their chants. The vanguard formed a firm rank, they steadily moved but put an emphasis in protecting the rear guard.

The knights who recovered also join them, then the signal for their counterattack came. The cheat class started to perform their martial arts and magic, they descended down on their enemy like a surging wave.

Monsters fell so quickly that they had finally passed the spawning rate of the magic circle.

Soon, the path to the stairs were opened.

"Everyone advance! We need to secure the stairs!"

Kouki started to run as soon as he shouted. The recovered Shizuku and Ryutaro accompanied Kouki in the charge. They cut through the encircling Traum Soldier like a hot knife through butter. Finally, they broke through the besiegement. Kouki quickly cast his magic to prevent the gap from the bridge they just created from being filled by the Soldiers.

The classmates looked doubtful. It will be like that. In front of them were the stairs, and naturally they wanted to get to safety quickly.

"Wait everyone! We still have to save Nagumo-kun! Just by himself, he has been suppressing that demon!"

Kaori's class faced her with a very doubtful expression. They all thought it was impossible, because they all thought he was useless. When the perplexed classmates looked over at the bridge, Hajime was really there.

"What is he doing?"

"That demon is buried!"

Meld answered the questions the

students had.

"It's true! It was because of him stopping that demon that we could retreat! Vanguard don't let any soldier near us! Rear guard prepare your long range magic! He is about to run out of magic, we will have him retreat while we bombard the Behemoth!"

The students braced themselves when that voice resounded with them. There were people who looked at in the direction of the stairs in regret. No wonder, they just had a near death experience. They naturally wanted to get to safety as fast as possible. However, when Meld angrily shouted out to hurry up, they returned to the battlefield.

In there was Hiyama Daisuke. Although he thought so highly of himself, he was really scared, he wanted to run as fast as possible away.

At that moment, the scene from that day flashed in his mind. It was yesterday when they were staying in Horlad. He was so overcome by anxiety of the next day that he couldn't sleep properly and went out to get some air then headed for the toilet. The cool breeze relaxed him and he was returning to his room when he saw something. Along the way, he had seen Kaori in her negligee. This was the first time he had seen her in such a state and he instinctively hid and held his breath at such a sight. Kaori passed by without noticing him.

Daisuke was interested and followed her, until she stopped in front of a certain room and knocked. The one to answer the door was....Hajime. Hiyama's mind blanked at that. He liked Kaori, however he thought that he was not good enough for her. When comparing himself to Kouki, he felt like he was way out of his league, so he gave up.

Hajime was different, Daisuke thought Hajime was inferior to him. So to find Hajime in the presence of Kaori was weird. He thought that if this was the case, why won't he do? Daisuke heard every word in his head, is his head alright? Hiyama seriously thought that though. His dissatisfaction against Hajime had always been piling up, now this had

swelled into hatred. When he saw Kaori get mesmerized by the Grantz Crystal, he was probably driven by these feelings.

Hiyama remembered all that. Looking at Hajime who was suppressing the Behemoth by himself, Kaori staring worried for Hajime and even praying for him....a dark smile bloomed on Daisuke's face.

Hajime felt his mana running out, and he had ran out of any potions. He quickly surveyed his surrounding and noticed that everyone had retreated. Ranks were being formed and magic was being prepared for the last part of the plan.

Behemoth was still struggling, at this rate there were still a few seconds of intermission even if he stopped transmuting. In the meantime he had to get some distance. A drop of sweat entered his eye. Hajime had never been in such a situation that caused his heart to thump so loudly that he could hear it. Timing was going to be important here.

Dozens of cracks formed in the restraints that held the Behemoth, and they were failing to hold it back. At the same moment, Hajime started to sprint.

5 seconds after Hajime started to run away, the Behemoth fully freed itself and roared. The rage present in its eyes could never be

misunderstood. Quickly it's vision searched for its sworn enemy and found Hajime. Behemoth roared in anger again , and collected power into its legs to chase after Hajime.

However, a barrage of magic attacks stopped it.

Like shooting stars painting the night sky, magic of countless colors bombarded the Behemoth. There was no damage, but the force prevented it from advancing.

Hajime lowered his head and dashed while taking care not to fall. With all those lethal spells passing over his head, Hajime was not afraid for his life. There was no way those cheats would be able to miss. The distance between the

Behemoth and him was also 30 m.

Hajime relaxed at that.

However, something happened that cause him to freeze.

One of the "Fireball" in the endless stream of spells, bent slightly and started to head his way. This was clearly aimed at him.

(Why!?)

Doubt and bewilderment, all of this ran through his brain and it appalled him.

Hajime slid and braced himself as the "Fireball" struck the ground right in front of his eyes. He was blown back the way he came from by the shockwave. No real damage

was taken because he was able to avoid a direct hit, but his sense of balance was thrown out of whack. Seems like semicircular canal was damaged.

Standing up was a little hard because he was dizzy. The Behemoth like usual was not going to go down alone. When Hajime got up, the beast roared again. Hajime looked at the Behemoth and was stunned by the piercing eyes it had. For the third time it's horns started to and he lunged towards Hajime.

The unsteady head, hazy vision, looming Behemoth, impatience screams and roars from his classmates in the distance.

Hajime tried desperately to muster

the strength to jump away. A furious shock ripped through the entire bridge, it shocked from the strength of the Behemoth's attack. Cracks spread out from the epicenter. The bridge screamed.

Finally, after all that punishment, the bridge collapsed.

The bridge had finally reached the threshold and gave out.

"Guaaa!"

Behemoth clawed desperately to find a place to hold on to. However even the ground that connected the bridge collapsed and fell into the abyss. Death throes could be heard from the Behemoth.

Hajime crawled to escape somehow,

however every place he held onto collapsed.

"Ah, it's no good..."

While he thought that, he turned his gaze towards his classmates. He saw Shizuku and Kaori holding Kaori back, like she wanted to jump after him. His other classmates were pale and had their hands over their eyes or mouths. Meld and the Knights had a mortifying expression on their faces.

The scaffolding that held Hajime finally crumbled. He fell backwards into the dark abyss, while he tried to grasp the dimming light.

Chapter 7: Wretched Malice

The death throes that the Behemoth echoed soon ceased. The stone bridge made a huge rattling noise as it crumbled. Hajime disappeared into the abyss along with the rubble. That sight, played for Kaori in slow motion and it filled her with despair.

In her head, last night's event repeatedly played in her mind. In the room illuminated by the moonlight, she sat here chatting with Hajime while they drank the fake black tea. That was the first time they had talked so in depth with each other. Being driven by her

nightmares, she paid a sudden visit to Hajime. Even if he was surprised, he had talked to her truthfully. After a bit, she noticed that talking to him had erased her uneasiness.

She returned to her room in a jubilant mood. When she arrived back at her room, she noticed how boldly she was dress and she writhe in shame. Kaori felt depressed because Hajime had not even reacted, in her eyes, to her looks. She felt she had no appeal. When Kaori saw Shizuku caught her making funny facial expression, she wanted to pretend it never happened.

On that night, the most important occurrence was the promise she made to "protect Hajime". The

promise that Hajime mentioned to relieve Kaori of her anxiety. Hajime disappeared into the abyss, as she stared at him. She kept recalling that memory over and over again.

Somewhere in the distance, a scream can be heard. When Kaori noticed that the voice belonged to her, she grimaced as she was quickly brought back to reality.

"Let me go! If I don't go to Nagumo-kun! I promised! I will...I said I will protect him! Let me go!"

Shizuku and Kouki had to restrain her, because Kaori looked like she would just jump after him. Kaori displayed such extraordinary power that they wondered where she got such power and how could she

display such an amount with her slender body. Unlucky for them, she used that power to break free from them.

If she kept struggling like this, she might damage her body. Nevertheless, they could absolutely couldn't let her go. If they released her, she would jump off the cliff. She did not have her usual calmness, not even a shadow of it, now she had such a frantic expression. No, it might be heartbreaking to say.

"Kaori! You can't! Kaori!"

Because Shizuku could understand Kaori's feelings, she could not find the right words to say. All she could do was call out her name

desperately.

"Kaori! Are you also trying to die? It's too late for Nagumo! Calm Down! You'll hurt yourself!"

Kouki tried to best to convey how worried he was of her. To the confused Kaori that was here and now, these were not the words to say to her.

"What do you mean "too late"? Nagumo-kun is not dead yet! If I don't go, he is surely asking for assistance!"

Nagumo Hajime was not savable, at least this is what everyone else thought. He fell from the cliff into that dark abyss. The composure to accept that reality, the present

Kaori did not have it. If anyone was to word it though, she would just deny it over and over again. Ryutaro and the other students did not what to do, so they stood there flustered.

At that moment, Meld approached them and struck Kaori in the back of her neck without saying anything. She jerked for a moment, then unconsciousness claimed her. Kouki held the now limp Kaori, and glared at Meld. When he was about to start complaining, Shizuku preemptively bowed her head and said.

"I'm Sorry. Thank you."

"Don't....Don't thank me. I can't let another person die. We will wholeheartedly leave this Dungeon.

I'll leave her to you."

"You don't even need to ask."

She watched him leave, she headed for Kouki and got him to hand Kaori to her. Kouki still had a disappointed expression on his face from being interrupted.

"Since we couldn't stop her, Meld had to. You understand, right? We don't have any time. Before her cries can start to affect everyone's spirit, we had to stop her before she broke down. Hey, you have to lead the way. So we can all get out of this. This is what Nagumo-kun would have said."

At her words, Kouki nodded.

"You are right, let's hurry."

They saw one of their classmate die in front of their eyes. This event had caused a lot of damage to be engraved into the students' spirit. Everyone was looked at where the bridge used to be in a stupefied expression . There was a girl that said "No more!" and sat down. Just like Hajime had exclaimed, the group needed a leader right now.

Kouki raised his voice towards his classmates

"Everyone! Right now, just think about surviving. We have to withdraw!"

The students moved sluggishly in response to his words. The magical circles that spawned the Traum Soldier was still active. Their

numbers increased one by one. At their current mental status fighting would be reckless, also it was not necessary to fight. Kouki shouted at his classmates to urge them to escape. Meld and his knights also tried to encourage the students.

Eventually, everyone escaped by the stairs.

The stairs to the upper level was long. It climbed so high that they could see nothing else but the stairs in the darkness. They felt like they had ascended 30 or more levels at that point. Even if their bodies were enhanced by magic, they would start feeling the fatigue soon. Wounds from their earlier battle was still present. It didn't help that the stairs were long and dimly light,

making the students even more gloomy. At this moment, Meld considered having a small rest, but refrained when he saw a huge wall that had a magical formation drawn on it.

Students' faces started to regain their vitality. Meld quickly approached the wall and started to investigate it. They did not forget to use the Fair Scope. From their investigation, the chance of it being a trap is very unlikely. The carved magical formula's purpose was to move the wall in front of them. Meld started to chant to pour magic into the magical formula. Just like a hidden door used by Ninjas, the door rotated to open the way and showed the room behind it.

The revealed room was a room they had visited in the 20th floor.

"We returned?"

"We made it back!"

"We did it...we got back..."

One after another a sigh of relief escaped from the classmates. There were a few students that burst into tears and others who just fell on their ass. Even Kouki and his party that were leaning on the wall, wanted to sit down. They were still in a Dungeon though. Even if it was a low number level, they did not when a monster could appear. They had to escape the Dungeon before they could actually relax.

Meld had to suppress his longing to

rest. He had to harden his heart as he shouted for the students to get up.

"You guys! Don't sit! If you get exhausted here, you won't be able to return! To avoid combat with any monsters we have to escape as quickly as possible. Hey, just endure it for a little more!"

For the students who wanted to rest more, they just stared in silent protest at him. The student reluctantly stood up while a bit dizzy. Kouki hide his fatigue and took point. On their way out, the knights concentrated on fighting as little amount of enemies as possible. They raced towards the entrance in one stretch.

Finally, they reached the 1st floor and saw the nostalgic entrance. They had not even stayed in the dungeon for a single day, many people felt it was such a long time since they had seen it.

This time the students really looked relieved after they exited the Dungeon. There were even students sprawled out in front of the gate square. All of them were pleased to have survived. Some of the students did not feel this way. Shizuku, who was still carrying the unconscious Karoi, Kouki, Ryutaro, Eri, Suzu, and the girl Hajime saved had a dark look.

Meld went to make a report at the reception area while minding the students with a side glance. There

was a new dangerous trap on the 20th level. Since the bridge had collapsed, there was no way of knowing the purpose of the trap, but he still needed to report it. He couldn't help but report Hajime's death. Meld was having a hard time not showing his depression on his face. A sigh couldn't help but escape from him.

* * *

When the group returned to Horald, they returned to their rooms without much spirit. There were a few students that discussed with each other, but most of the students had already fallen asleep on their bed.

And then there was Hiyama

Daisuke. Outside of the inn and located at a corner in the town he sat there. He choose an inconspicuous place to sit with his hands hugging his knees. Buried between his knees was his face that was very still. If his fellow class saw him, it would look like he was depressed that one of his classmates had passed. However...

"Hi, Hihihi. I-It was his fault! For a small fry...h-he got carried away...i-it was divine punishment. I'm not wrong...it was for Shirasaki's sake...that small fry...is not longer a concern...I'm not wrong....hihihi"

With his dark smile and dull eyes, he tried to justify himself.

The fireball that veered off course

and hit Hajime was casted by Hiyama. The escape to the stairs and rescuing of Hajime, the sight of Hajime and Kaori's night rendezvous, Hiyama heard a devil whisper to him. If I killed him now, no one will notice? At that moment he sold his soul to the devil.

To not be discovered, Hiyama timed his shot very carefully and lead his fireball to Hajime. In that chaotic barrage it would be very difficult to work out who casted what. He chose the fireball because his aptitude was wind. There would be no evidence or any suspicion. Hiyama told all of this to himself as gave off a dark laugh.

Someone at that moment called out to him.

"Heh, it really was you. The first murder from another world is a fellow classmate...you did quite well!"

"W-Who?"

Hiyama backed away in a panic. The one who hailed him was a classmate he knew.

"Y-You, what are you doing here?"

"Don't worry about such a thing. Rather than that...Murder-san? How do you feel right now? How does it feel to kill off a love rival in midst of the confusion? "

That person laughed a little. Like he had just seen a comedy. Hiyama said to himself, one classmate did die, yet this person did not care. All

the other classmates were shocked and looked miserable, but this person had no such expression on his face, not even a speck.

"Is this your true nature?"

The stunned Hiyama muttered out. A condescending scoff could be heard from the person.

"Nature? It's not anything complicated like that. Isn't it common to have a few secrets? More important that that...what would happen if I spread this to everyone? Especially...if she heard it."

"S-Such a thing...No one would believe...and the evidence?"

"None, but they would believe my

words. At that moment, do you think your words would be good enough?"

Hiyama was cornered. The words was used to teased the already weakened mouse. No one would have imagined that this fellow could be like this. Daisuke still couldn't believe that this person had a split personality. The person looked down at Daisuke with a sadistic expression that sent chills throughout his body.

"What do you want?"

"Regrettable. It would seem like I'm threatening you, isn't it? Fufu. It's not like I want something from you right now. For now, all you have to do is be my hands and feet. "

"Such a thing..."

It was something like a slave declaration. Naturally, Hiyama hesitated at that. He wanted to refuse, but if he did then this person would mercilessly spread the rumor about his deeds. The conflicted Hiyama thought, "Still working with this person is better than imprisonment." This character foresaw Hiyama's conflict and decided to tempt him.

"Don't you want Shirasaki Kaori?"

"W-What did you say?"

Hiyama's gloomy thoughts were blown away in an instant and just stared at the person. This individual smirked at Hiyama's stunned

visage, and continued with the temptation.

"If you follow me...someday you will obtain her. I was going to approach Nagumo-kun with this offer, but you killed him. You may be more suited for what I have in store, so I guess it all worked out in the end. "

"...What's your objective? What do you want to accomplish?"

In this situation he was ignorant of, he unknowingly raised his voice.

"Fufu, it has nothing to do with you. I'm searching for something, that's all I'll say....So, your answer?"

Hiyama did not want to disturb him and just filed away the person attitude of treating him like an idiot

into his memory. Daisuke was very afraid of this transformation of character, he did not have much choice so he just nodded his head.

"....I'll obey."

"Ahahaha, that's good. Having to prosecute my own classmate would be painful. Well, let's get along, Murder-san! Ahahaha"

Hiyama just watched the person return in the direction of the inn while they laughed happily, a small "damn" escaped from his lips.

Even if he wants to forget, just being in denial will not erase it, this scene would stick to him. The expression Kaori had when Hajime fell into the abyss. What kind of

words would articulate her feelings?

Right now, while all those dead tired students slept likes logs. Hajime's death at the abyss helped discern Kaori's feelings. Kaori never took care of Hajime just for good will. When looking at the exhausted Kaori, this would apply awareness to the cause. Hiyama jeopardized himself by performing such a careless act.

He must conduct himself well. In order to secure one's place. Hiyama had already crossed the line. It wasn't possible to stop now. According to that individual, There was a possibility of him disappearing and a possibility that he would get Kaori.

"Fufu, It will be alright. Everything will go well. I'm not wrong..."

Hiyama returned to his previous position and started to mumble again. This time not a single person bothered him.

Chapter 8: Abyss

Gore Warning

[This is actually written in the original text]

[Ha-a will be the way I differentiate between a sigh and a laugh. Laugh = Ha. Sigh = Ha-a or Haa.]

* * *

Zaa-the sound of running water. A cool breeze brushed against his cheeks and caused him to tremble. There was a solid sensation in contact with his face and a chill pierced his lower half of his body. Hajime raised a groan as he work up.

Absentmindedly, he put forth effort to sit upright while his whole body scowl as it throbbed with pain.

"Ow, This is...For sure I..."

Holding his unsteady head with one hand, he studied the vicinity whilst he recalled his memories. Even though the surrounding was dim, thanks to the emission from the green light stones, it was not like he was blinded by the darkness. In front of Hajime was a river about 5 m in width, and it was in this that his lower body was submerged in. Hajime's upper body seems to have been caught and stranded by protruding rocks located at the side of the river.

"Yeah...I fell down the broken

bridge...thereupon..."

His head that had a fog clouding his mind finally started to turns its gears again. Hajime must have survived the drop by sheer luck. In the middle of his fall he encountered area where the cliff had a puncture, from this leak water sprouted out like a flood. There were numberless waterfalls here, and these waterfalls blew away Hajime time after time until gradually he was thrust to the wall. At the very end he was pushed out of a tunnel that was like a waterslide. It was an unbelievable miracle. When he was flying out of the tunnel Hajime hit his head and lost consciousness. Personally, Hajime did not know how such a miracle took place.

"Anyway, I was saved...Achoo! I-It's cold."

He was submerged in the cold underground water this whole time, because of this his whole body was completely cold. At this rate there was a possibility that he could catch hypothermia, Hajime quickly picked himself up. Trembling and shivering he took off his clothes and wringed them.

Using his transmutation he created a single sheet of paper. On the hard stone floor he started to engrave a transmutation circle.

"It's too cold to concentrate..."

He wanted a "Spark" magic. This was a simple magic that even

children could perform with a 10 cm magic formation. At this moment, there was no magic stones to increase the efficiency of the magic because Hajime needed it with his zero aptitude for magic. Hajime would have to make a complicated formula that would be 1 m in diameter to cast that "Spark". After 10 minutes he was able to finished the magic formation and started his chanting to activate it.

"I seek fire,The power of light, Manifest, "Spark"....Why is there such an exaggerated chant just to create an ordinary flame? So embarrassing...Ha-a."

The sighing seems to have become a habit recently. Still he invoked the fist-sized flame and bathed in its

warmth. He set his clothes side by side near the flames to dry it.

"I wonder where this is...I think I fell a considerable height...can I return?"

Warming himself with the flame, he could feel himself calm. Gradually anxiety started to fill his heart. Hajime really wanted to cry, tears even started to accumulate in his eyes , but he bore with it because if he cried now he would fall apart. He wiped away the tears that had collected and slapped his own cheeks.

"Got no other choice, I have to find a way back. It's fine, I'm sure it will be fine."

Hajime's face developed into a determined one after he muttered encouragements to himself, all while staring at the flames.

After about 20 minutes the clothes were dry and warm, so Hajime set off. Hajime was not sure which level he was in but for sure he was still in the Dungeon. It wouldn't be strange to have monsters lurking. He carefully proceeded to walk down into a huge passage that lead into the depths.

The passage that Hajime continued on felt like a cave. Rather than a low-rise square passage, the passage had rocks and walls protruding in many places and it winds around complicatedly. It was similar to the last room on the 20th

floor, the only difference was the size. The complicated passage full of obstacles was 20 m in diameter. Even the more narrow places was still 10 m in diameter. Although it was not an easy path to treat, there were a lot of places to hide and Hajime advanced stealthily from hiding area to hiding area.

He wondered how much he walked. Hajime started to feel tired, until he finally reached a fork for the first time. A huge crossroad was presented to him. Behind the boulder was Hajime hiding, he wondered which path he should take.

A moment was taken to think over it. He thought he saw something at the edge of his vision and he

quickly hid behind a rock. Quietly he stuck his head out and waited to see. From the passage straight ahead, a white fur ball hopped into view. It had long ears, and it looked like a rabbit. However, it was about the size of a mid-sized dog and its hind legs were heavily muscled. The "rabbit" also had several dark red lines running along its body like blood vessels, the lines also pulsated like a heart. That was very creepy.

Clearly, it was a dangerous demon. Hajime decided to avoid by going left or right instead of going straight. It looked like he wouldn't be able to proceed to the right because the "rabbit" was near it. Hajime held his breath and waited for the time to move. At that

moment, the rabbit turned around and started to sniff the ground. Right now! He tried to move at that.

The rabbit seemed to react to that and it quickly straighten its back to stand up. It's vigilant ears rustled.

(Crap! D-Did it find me? I-I'm fine?)

He clung his body to the boulder to hide himself, and he tried to gain control of his thumping heart. Those keen ear felt like they could pick up his throbbing heart, he broke out into a cold sweat at that thought.

Luckily, it was a different reason the rabbit was alert.

"Guru~ua!"

A wolf-like demon with white hair jumped out and growled at the rabbit. The white wolf had two tails and was about the size of a large dog. Just like the rabbit, the wolf had the same palpitating dark red lines all over its body. After that wolf jump out, two more wolves jumped out from behind different stones to join it.

Hajime peeked his head out and observed the situation. No matter how you look at it, the wolves were going to prey on the rabbit-chan (though it wasn't cute enough to attach chan). With the cover of confusion Hajime half rose his feet. However...

"Kyu!"

A cute cry leaked from it and jumped into the air with a rotation. The rabbit gave a roundhouse kick with its massive legs and smacked the first wolf.

Dopan

The kick generated a sound that wasn't thought possible. Rabbit-chan's got a clean kick to the wolf's head.

Gogya

There was a resounding echo and Hajime could see that the wolf's neck had been bent into the wrong direction.

Hajime went rigid at that display. Using the centrifugal force from the roundhouse kick, the rabbit rotated

in the air until it was in an upside-down state. The rabbit stomped the air and fell towards the ground like a meteor. Just before landing, it rotated itself perpendicular to it and gave a powerful heel drop to the wolf close to the landing point.

Begya

Without even getting the chance to give off a death throe, both the wolves heads were pulverized. Another two wolves appeared to jump at the rabbit when it landed. Hajime thought it was this moment that the rabbit would lose. The rabbit was able to do a handstand while rotating his legs, just like a break dancer. Both of the wolves were flung towards and slammed against it because of the tornado

like rotating kicks. Blood splashed against the walls and their corpse trailed down.

The last wolf ruffled its tail as it growled. Soon the tails started to discharge electricity. It was trying to cast a Special Magic.

"Guru-ua!"

Lightning fly at the rabbit with a howl. As the high-speed lightning approached, the rabbit avoided it splendidly by performing zigzagging steps. When the lightning dissipated the rabbit drove a somersault kick into the wolf's jaw in one go. The kick blew the wolf away and it landed on the ground backwards and bent. It seemed like its neck broke from the

force.

"Kyu!"

A victory cry? The rabbit raised its forelimbs and brushed off its ears.

"Mommy, tell me it's a lie."

Hajime who was still stiff can only give a dry smile. Isn't this dangerous? The Traum Soldier that the students had trouble with looked like toys compared to this bunny. This rabbit may be stronger than the Behemoth, who could only do simple monotonous attacks.

He knew that if he was caught it would be certain death, this fretting caused him to unconsciously step back. That was an error.

Karan [Tap]

That noise echoed throughout the whole cave. Hajime had kicked a pebble near his feet that fell and created that racket. Such a cliché grave mistake. A large amount of cold sweat streamed down his face. The rabbit turns its head like a machine that wasn't oiled to the sound.

Hajime was definitely seen.

It's ruby red eyes narrow as it caught sight of Hajime. He froze like a frog hypnotized by a snake. Alarms bells started to go off in his head and his soul told him to run for his life, but his body did not listen to him.

Finally, the rabbit that had only been looking back at Hajime with his head, orientated its whole body towards him. It started to pour energy into its legs.

"It's coming!"

He instinctively knew that. Rabbit demon exploded towards him, it dashed at him at an absurd speed that left afterimages behind it.

When he noticed it, he jumped aside with all his might.

The place where he was just at exploded like a cannonball had just struck it. It gouged out the ground as it detonated. Hajime rolled while the earth rumbled, and stopped with his backside on the floor. He

retreated from the epicenter with a pale face.

Slowly the rabbit stood up with a slack attitude, after it continued its assault. Hajime quickly constructed a stone wall with his transmutation. Stone wall met the rabbit's kick and easily the kick pierced through it. By pure reflex he brought up his left arm to block. Good thing his face was not crushed, but the impact launched him to the ground. Pain coursed through his left arm when he gathered himself.

"Augh"

When he looked at his left forearm, it was broken and bent in a funny angle. Looks like it was totally crushed. Crouching in pain, he

desperately sought out the rabbit. What he found was the rabbit walking in a relaxed manner, a total inverse of its earlier attitude. It must have been his imagination, but its eyes were staring at him in a condescending. Looks like it was having fun messing with him.

Since he was on his backside, he couldn't even retreat that well. There standing in front of Hajime was the rabbit. It looked down on him, like he was some worm crawling on the earth. The rabbit brandished its foot to show it off.

(...I wonder if this is the end...)

Despair assailed Hajime. He adopted a dazed looked and gave up as he stared at the rabbit's feet.

Eventually the kick of instant death was swung.

Hajime shut his eyes, horrified at the impending doom.

.....

No matter how much time passed, the expected blow never came. He fearfully opened his eyes and in front of his face was the rabbit's foot. The kick was stopped just before it made impact. It can't be, was it still playing with him and trying to instill even more anguish in him? Hajime noticed something though, when he looked closely the rabbit was trembling.

(W-What? Why is it trembling....it seems scared....)

No, not "seem", it really was afraid. Hajime tried to run for the right passage, but he caught sight of a new demon.

Huge, was a word that could describe it. The beast was 2 m tall and its whole frame covered in white fur. Like all the other monsters he met here, this beast also had pulsating dark red lines wrapping its body. If he could compare it to another animal then a bear came to mind. One differences were that its arm extended all the way down to its feet, and these arms had 3 claws protruding out almost 30 cm.

Before he knew it that bear was nearby, while it glared at its prey. Silence surrounded the area. Both

Hajime and the rabbit was frozen and could not move. No, would not move. Just like how Hajime was earlier. The bear's stare had stopped them.

"...Gururu."

Tired of the situation, the bear started to growl.

"Tsu!"

This caused the rabbit to return to reality. It quickly turned tail and instantly retreated at top speed. All that speed it used to crush its enemies was now being used to escape. Too bad it was all for naught.

Using speed that didn't suit its size, the bear aimed it's sharp claws at

the rabbit. The rabbit used its agility to twist his body to dodge the blow. Hajime was certain the bear's claws had missed their target, and he saw the rabbit finish dodging.

When it landed, blood started to gush from its body as multiple cut wounds emerged on its body. More and more blood poured out of its wound until Hajime noticed that its body wasn't whole anymore. Piece by piece sections of the rabbit slipped off in different direction and a fountain of blood sprayed when the largest section was set free.

The gore show disgusted Hajime. A rabbit demon that powerful was taken down so easily without it being able to do anything. Now he

knew why it was so scared. That bear demon was extraordinary. This guy would destroy any person Hajime knew of.

Lumbering its huge body, the bear approached the fresh corpse. Sounds of gorging could be heard from the bear.

Hajime could not move. Still consumed by fear, the beast eyes pin down Hajime with its eyes.

Nothing was left of the rabbit after the bear took 3 mouthful of it. It turned around and growled at Hajime. The beast's eyes said it all, "You are next."

Presented with the eyes of a predator all he could do was

despair.

"Uwaaa-" [Ah!]

Hajime ran the opposite direction of the bear while screaming madly and forgetting about his broken arm.

If something like that rabbit couldn't escape then it did not look good for Hajime. The wind howl and from his left he felt pain explode in his body as he was flung against the wall.

"Gah!"

The blow had knocked all the air out of his lungs. He trailed down the wall as he collapsed into a fit of coughs. Hajime was swaying from the impact but he kept his eyes on

the bear. Then he noticed the bear was chewing on something.

What the hell was it chewing on? The rabbit was already consumed. Somehow the arm it was eating was very familiar. Hajime was confused at the event, because he felt lighter on his left side. To be precise, his left arm...

"A-Are?" [What]

Hajime's face stiffened. Why is there no arm? Why was blood spurting out? He tilt his head. Hajime could not make sense of what happened. The reality of the situation finally hit him. Pain was the reminder that this was no dream.

"Ahhhhhhh!!!!"

His shriek echoed in the passage. Everything below his left elbow had disappeared.

The beast still had its Special Magic. His three claws were able to create blades of wind that could extend up to 30 cm. If you thought about it losing just one arm was fortunate. The bear was playing with Hajime and it begged the question if Hajime was lucky. Considering that the rabbit earlier had been dealt with so quickly.

After he was finished with his meal, the bear advanced towards Hajime. His eyes was not condescending like the rabbit's. The beast just looked at Hajime as food.

The beast extended its forelimbs toward Hajime. It looked like it was going to eat Hajime alive.

"A, A, Guu, Re "Rensei"!"
[Transmute]

While tears and mucus flowed, drool escaped from his mouth, he transmuted the wall with his only arm. It was an unconscious action. The only power that was available to the Hajime that had such low specs. Using magic that is usually only used to process weapons. This class was without a doubt a crafting class. Thought of as useless in combat, but another worlder showed the knights a new application for its skill. A skill that saved the lives of his classmate. On the brink of death, he choose to rely

on that skill, and it answered him with a means of escape.

A hole 50 cm in height, 120 c in width, and 2m in depth formed in the wall. Hajime rolled into the hole and narrowly escaped the bears paws reaching towards him.

It was overwhelmed with anger from losing a prey.

"Guruaa!!"

The beast casted its Special Magic while it roared. It aimed its magic towards the hole Hajime made. A terrible destruction followed as the wall was shaved off my the powerful claws.

"Ahhhh--! "Rensei"! "Rensei"! "Rensei"!"

Pancing from the monster that was gradually getting closer, Hajime started to continuously cast his transmuting and delved deeper into the wall. He did not even bother to look back. Recklessly he repeated the magic, and advanced with a crawl. All his pains or any other thoughts were put in the backseat. Mana was consumed over and over again as his survival instinct had control over him.

How much did he progress? Hajime did not know, but he couldn't hear the terrible sounds. In reality, he did not progress that much. Each cast of his "Rensei" allowed him to advance 2 m (This was twice as strong as his earlier days). The main problem was his bleeding, he would not be able to move soon.

His awareness was already gone from the excessive bleeding. Still his body pushed forward.

""Rensei"..."Rensei"..."Rensei"..."Rensei"..."

No matter how many times he chanted, the wall did not change. His magic ran out before his body gave out. Exhausted, his hands fell from the wall.

Hajime fell on his back and his last strand of consciousness was going out. He just aimlessly started to the heavens, but all he saw was darkness.

Hajime at this time recalled some past memories. It was like a Revolving Lantern(*). His life flashed before his eyes. His nursery

and elementary school, middle school, and high school days. Various memories flooded his mind until his last memory. In that bedroom illuminated by the moonlight. The chat he had with a goddess and the promise they made. Her smiling face.

After remembering that beautiful sight, the darkness engulfed him. Just before sleep claimed him, he felt a drop of water on his cheek. Like someone had shed a tear for him.

* * *

* Revolving Lantern is a show where a lantern has some cutouts done in them and in the center a candle or light source is placed. The

shadow casted by the light and cutouts could provide a show. Usually the light is directed to one direction so a story could be told.

Chapter 9: Complete Change

Tsukkomi from Manzai is Default.

Forgive me.

* * *

Drip...Drip...

Hajime felt his consciousness return gradually as the drips of water hit his cheeks and entered his mouth. Wondering what was the cause, he slowly opened his eyes.

(...I'm alive?...I'm saved?...)

Attempting to get up, he was

stopped when his forehead hit the low ceiling of the hole.

"Aku!?"

He totally forgot about the hole he constructed that was only 50cm high. Hajime extended his hand to the ceiling to transmute a higher ceiling. Only one arm came into view. He remembered he lost his left arm, and felt phantom limb pains. At that he kept his left arm down, or what remained of it. There was swelling around the wound but it had closed.

"H-How?...There is so much blood..."

He couldn't see in the darkness, but if he had some light he would be

able to see the pool of blood. The amount of blood he lost would have normally killed someone. To survey the surrounding he felt around with his hand and felt something slimy. His blood was still there and it had yet to dry. After All, it seemed he had bled, and it seemed not much time had passed since he fainted.

While he was wondering about his wound, another drop of water hit his cheeks. The moment it entered his mouth, he felt his body reenergize.

"...No way...was it this?"

Using his hand he performed a transmutation on the area where the droplet came from, while he ignored his phantom limb pains.

Progressing further and further in as he transmuted a little lightheaded. Mysteriously when he drank the liquid his mana returned and no matter how much transmuting he performed his mana did not run out. Hajime repeatedly transfigured to find the water source.

Eventually the amount of mysterious liquid increased and more trickling could be heard. Hajime finally reached the source.

"This...is..."

An ore the size of a basketball emitting a light existed there. This ore was buried and assimilated with the surrounding rocks, and it dripped the liquid. A beautiful and

mysterious stone. The ore was emitting darker blue than aquamarine, at least that was the best representation he could think of. His phantom limb pain was left forgotten.

Fascinated with the stone, Hajime reached out to touch it with his mouth. The dull pain and haze that his body and mind felt was cleared, and the fatigue disappeared. Seems like the liquid from this stone had saved him. The liquid seemed to hold restorative powers. Phantom limb pains still occurred, but the other injuries or negative effects were healed.

Hajime didn't know, but this stone was the highest grade treasure called "God's Crystal". The crystal is

a legendary relic thought to have been just a story. Formation of such a crystal is a miracle, because it was the crystallization of magical pools that collect by chance and needed 1000 years to form. Looking over it, the crystal was about 30-40 cm in diameter. After it has crystallized, it takes several hundred more years to saturate it to cause overflowing. That overflowing liquid is called "Sacred Water", and when drank it could cure any injury or disease. Though it doesn't have the power to regenerate parts, and it is considered a fountain of youth if continuously taken. A story of Eht healing people with this sacred water in ancient time is often recited.

He noticed that he returned from

the brink of death. Hajime who was leaning on the wall sagged down. Bring up both knees, he placed his head between them while shivering from his close brush with death. He had no energy to even try to escape, his heart was broken.

Hajime might confront hostility and malice. Any rescue would be appreciated, and he might be able to stand up again. However, that bear's eyes scared him. He did not want to encounter the eyes of a predator that wanted to devour him. Eyes that he had no experience with because he was used to being the top law of the jungle. Those eyes were responsible for why his arm was eaten and this broke his heart.

"Some...help me..."

In this abyss, his voice did not reach anyone...

* * *

What did he do?

Hajime was laying on his side curled up into a fetus position.

Four days have passed since his collapse. All this time he had not moved much and the sacred water had sustained him. The sacred water could keep a person alive except for extreme circumstances, and it did not ease any hunger pangs. He wasn't going to die, but he was suffering from phantom limb pains and starving sensation.

(How did I end up like this?)

A question he asked himself over and over again. His mind had recovered from drinking the sacred water, even if he suffered from pain and hunger. Unfortunately, because he had a clear mind, all the suffering was clearly felt.

One day Hajime stopped drinking the sacred water.

(If this anguish continues for so long...I rather...)

After he muttered that, he fell unconscious.

Three days passed. The hunger that calmed had returned. His phantom limb pains did not subside.

(Still...I'm not dead...I don't want to die...)

Although he wished for death, a part of him still wanted to live. Conflicting thoughts alternated within his mind. He could no longer form any normal thoughts. His murmurs became incoherent and delirious.

Three more days elapsed. The sacred water was losing its efficiency, at this rate two more days and he would most likely be dead. He had not taken in fluids, let alone food.

Abnormalities started to appear in Hajime's mind recently.

(Why do I have to suffer....What did

I do...)

(Why did this happen...What's the cause...)

(God unreasonably abducted me...)

(A classmate betrayed me...)

(The rabbit looked down on me...)

(That guy ate me...)

Gradually his thoughts became darker. Who was wrong? Who forced their unreasonableness onto him? Who harmed him? Pain gradually turned into rage, rage led to hatred, he seeked an enemy. Everything had worked into corrupt his spirit. The severe pain and starvation that wrecked his body, and the events that led him here

into this endless darkness.

(Nobody has come to rescue me....)

(If nobody is going to help me, what should I do?)

(How do I rid myself of this pain?)

Day 9. Hajime thoughts had made a breakthrough about his current situation. With a heart that wanted release from its torment, he needed to first expel the unnecessary hatred and anger. Because the suffering did not end when his heart turned black...

(What...am I wishing for?)

(I wish for "life".)

(What type of people impedes me?)

(My enemies)

(Then what should I do?)

(I-I...)

Day ten. His heart was now free of hatred and anger. The outrageous God, back-stabbing classmate, hostile demons, the smiling person desiring to protect him, all of them mattered naught. To live, to earn the privilege to survive, everything else was trivialities. Hajime had arrived at an answer for his question.

That is...

(KILL)

Not for malice, animosity, or hate. In order to live, he will kill with

pure intent.

All those who threaten his survival are enemies, and to my enemies...

(KILL, KILL, KILL,

gentle, apologizing with a bitter smile at any sign of conflict, the Hajime that Kaori thought was strong, utterly fell from grace.

A new Nagumo Hajime came into existence. A Nagumo Hajime that would ruthlessly eliminate any who stood in his way of survival. His broken heart broke again. This new heart however was not a weak heart that was roughly patched up. No, his new tough heart was re-forged by the fires of agony, despair and darkness.

Hajime starts to move his completely weakened body. For the past few days he had slurped on the accumulated sacred water like a dog given a drinking bowl. The hunger or phantom limb pain did not

disappear, but it revitalized his body.

His eyes shined glaringly, his watery mouth needed to be wiped and his face broke out into a fearless grin. The canines in his warped mouth gained a glint. Certainly his expression had a sudden change just like his thoughts. Hajime arose to proclaim a transmutation and he muttered again...

"KILL"

* * *

In the labyrinth there was a pack of two-tailed wolves. A pack of wolves usually consisted of 4-6 members. Because they were the weakest demon on this level, they

compensated by cooperating in a group. The group Hajime saw was no exception, they totaled four in number.

Cautiously, he observed his surroundings from his hiding spot near the wall and waited for the best hunting ground. The most fundamental hunting method was setting up an ambush. He let the wolves wander for a while until the perfect ambush site was discovered, this site had rocks covering the four corners. Now he waited for the prey to come. The moment one of them showed up, it was going to get butchered by being sandwiched by a rock and the wall. Hajime was practically salivating at the thought of his prey, until he felt something was off.

Since their most important survival tool is their cooperation, they had an almost telepathic link with each other. Packmates would not be able to directly communicate with each other, but they would somehow know where each were and what they were doing. However, something was something wrong. They were gathered into a group of four but somehow the leader could only sense three left among them. One of the wolves' signature that was at the opposite side of the wall disappeared.

It harbored doubts, when he put in the effort to raise from his prone position, it heard one of its packmate scream. Restlessness was conveyed from one wolf that was near the companion that

disappeared. The comrade was caught and stuck between something and could not slip out. Two wolves on the opposite side rushed up to rescue him. However, the sign of that struggling animal disappeared.

Confused, it quickly went to the wall and checked the area, but nothing was there. The remaining two puzzled wolves used their noses to sniff around the area the two other wolves disappeared from to get a hint.

At that moment, the ground depressed, and the walls protruded out to cover them. When they were about to jump aside, the depressed floor suddenly reverted back to its original state. This would make

escaping the trap an easy task for the wolves. If it had not been confused with encountering such a new experience, they would not have been caught so easily. The assailant had already planned for their confusion and that single moment of hesitation. That was a good enough opportunity to catch them.

"Guru-ua!?"

The two wolves screamed as the walls swallowed them....then nothing was left.

Hajime was the one to catch all four of those wolves. Fighting back with determination, he was able to oppress his hunger and phantom limb pains. The sacred water had

sustained him so far, it was a good thing he trained earnestly repeatedly his transmuting and mana capacity.

His transmuting was more quick, more accurate and more extensive now. If he went out right now, he might die. He had accumulated training when he was in the room with the God's Crystal. Hajime wanted to polish his weapon even if slightly, and of course his weapon is transmutation.

Even if it was possible for him to endure the pains, they still assaulted him. These pains were probably what made Hajime concentrate to such an extreme manner.This allowed him to perform several times faster than

normal, and his transmuting range was three meters now. Of course he did not have an earth attribute magic that could be used offensively.

He had a small container filled with sacred water and started to look for his enemies. Using his transmuting he was able to find the four wolves. Hajime decided to tail them. Many times he was almost found out, but he was able to lose their trail by hiding in spots he constructed with his transmuting. That was when he sprang his trap and using his transmuting he dragged them into the wall.

"Now what? My transmutation has no direct killing power. Both the speed and power of my transmuting

did not seem to be enough to kill the demons."

Hajime looked through a tiny peep hole with his glistening eyes. The motionless pack growled while they were in the wall.

Looked like he was right, the wolves had not died. Previously, he had attacked them with the splintering stone but it seemed that there was not enough power and speed to harm them. This was probably because of the earth here. His magic was only used to process minerals, so using such a power to kill seemed to be out of reach. Thus, restraining them was the best he could do.

"I wonder if I should suffocate

them...but I can't wait for that."

Hajime's eyes started to grin as it gained a predatorial glint. He press his right arm against the wall and casted his magic. A piece of stone was cut off and slowly he transfigured it while he concentrated on an image. When it was done the stone had been turned into a thin spiral spear. Furthermore, it had other parts added on to it, like a handle.

"Now then, to dig!"

The spear was stabbed towards the ground where the wolves resided. Hard fur and skin made contact with the tip of the spear.

"After all I can't stab you. That

confirms my hypothesis."

Why didn't he use a sword or knife? Because it is widely known that the stronger the demon the harder it becomes. There were a few exceptions to it. Hajime had studied a lot to overcome his uselessness and from what he had gathered a normal sword or knife would be useless against these guys.

Thus, Hajime started to rotate the handle on the spear. The spear spiraled to match Hajime's actions. He was using this spear as a drill to pierce through the demon's hard skin.

Applying his weight to turn it, and eventually it started to slowly dig into the beast's skin.

"Guru-aa!!"

The wolf screamed.

"Does it hurt? I won't apologize. I'm doing this to live. Don't you guys eat me too? We both feel the same."

While talking, he had constantly been rotating the drill. The wolf tried to struggle desperately, but it was impossible because it had not a single gap to work against.

Finally, the drill had broken through its tough skin layer. The drill mercilessly destroyed the wolf's innards. A death cry escaped from its mouth. It screamed for a bit but soon it twitched for a bit and finally stopped moving.

"Alright, let's secure the food first."

Laughing gleefully, he butchered the other three in the same manner. When he was done, the carcasses was recovered using transmutation. The fur on them was removed with some trouble, he only had one hand.

His hunger stimulated his desire to consume.

Chapter 10: Weapon Creation

In the darkness, the light stones illuminate the surrounding area.

The light projected a few shadows. One of the shadows, provided a silhouette of someone crouching in front of a beast while chewing could be heard.

"Augh, Guu, This seriously sucks."

Hajime ate the wolf meat with a curse. The meat was very tough, and blood dripped off as he took a bite and swallowed. This had been his first meal for the past weeks. The stomach was surprised to

suddenly receive the meat. Pains shot through his body at the stomach's protest. Hajime knew he would get such a response and ignore it to keep eating.

His appearance looked so feral. If any of the civilized humans saw what was going it they would be repulsed. The disgusting smell and taste would cause them to lose their appetite. Hajime did not even consider such a thought because he was happy to have a meal. He continued to eat in a daze.

After eating so much of this meat that his belly swelled and drinking the sacred water that the Church of Saints would be envious of. An unusual phenomenon struck his body.

"Ah?...Augh!?"

An intense pain suddenly wracked his body. Erosion, that was the best word to describe what horrible sensation he felt going through his body. The pain intensified as time passed.

"Guaa! W-What...Guu!"

Excruciating pain corroded his body. Hajime thrashed on the ground. This pain was so strong that it blew away his phantom limb pain.

With his trembling hands, Hajime reached into his breast pocket and took out a test-tube made of stone. He quickly chewed the edge of the tube and drank the contents inside.

The sacred water quickly went to work and the pain subsided, but a short time later the agony continued.

"Higugaa! What the...it didn't help? Augh!"

His body started to pulsate with the pain. Thump, Thump, his body pulsed. Even the sounds could be heard coming from his body.

However the next moment, the sacred water's healing properties started to restore his body. When it was done healing him, the pain returned. Then it was repaired again.

Even the sacred water could not stunt the effects. The tremendous

healing ability was actually backfiring here.

Hajime screamed as he floundered on the ground. He banged his head repeatedly against the wall at the unending sight of his hell. Even if he wanted to die, there would be noone to grant his desire, so he had no choice but to endure it.

Changes started to form on Hajime's body. First, his hair lost all color. Maybe because of a pain that broke his threshold, or another cause, his black Japanese hair turned white. Next, his muscles and skeleton started to thicken. Crimson lines started to emerge all over his body.

There is a phenomenon called

overcompensation. This is the process the body goes through when training muscles. The muscles are broken down from the severe use and in order to compensate and adapt to the strain it creates stronger and more muscle when the body recovers. The same happens to the skeletal system. Hajime's body was going through this phenomenon.

Demon meat was a deadly poison for humans. All of them had Magic Stones in their body, and this allowed for their wonderful physical ability with their magical power. Inside his body this magic was strongly permeating his muscles and bones.

This magic was the Special Magic

that did not require the magic circles or incantation to cast, and his magic was getting altered. This kind of alteration would be fatal to a human. From the inside of the body the poison would erode the body and destroy the cells. In the past, anyone who had consumed demon flesh was broken to pieces and died. Hajime knew of this, but his starvation had caused him to be unable to recall this knowledge.

If Hajime had just ate the demon flesh than he would have collapsed and died. However, there was an elixir that prevented that. Sacred water, it will restore immediately what once was broken. Because of this constant breaking and restoring, overcompensation, his body strengthened at an

unbelievable speed.

Destroy, Repair, Destroy, then Repair. The body changed while pulsing. It looked like he was being reborn. A ceremony of birth to throw away the body's weakness,a metamorphosis. Hajime's screams was like the first cry of a newborn.

When the pulsation stopped, Hajime went limp. Pure white was his hair color now, and crimson lines formed on his body. He was just like the monsters that plagued this level.

Hajime's right hand twitched. The closed eyes were opened slightly. His unfocused eyes settled onto his right hand. Grasping his hand into a fist, he scratched along the

ground. Hajime slowly clasped and unclasp his hand to prove he was still alive. When he finished checking if he had control of his body, he stood up slowly.

"...Oh, yeah. You weren't suppose to eat demon meat...I'm an idiot...but he couldn't help but eat it."

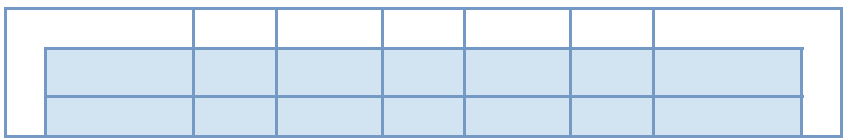
Completely exhausted, Hajime just snorted. Both his hunger and his phantom limb pain disappeared after this incident. On the contrary, his body felt strangely light and overflowed with power. Even though he just went through that, it was in its best condition. The most clearly developed muscles was his arm and abdomen. Hajime heights also increased by 10 cm, bringing the total height to 175 cm.

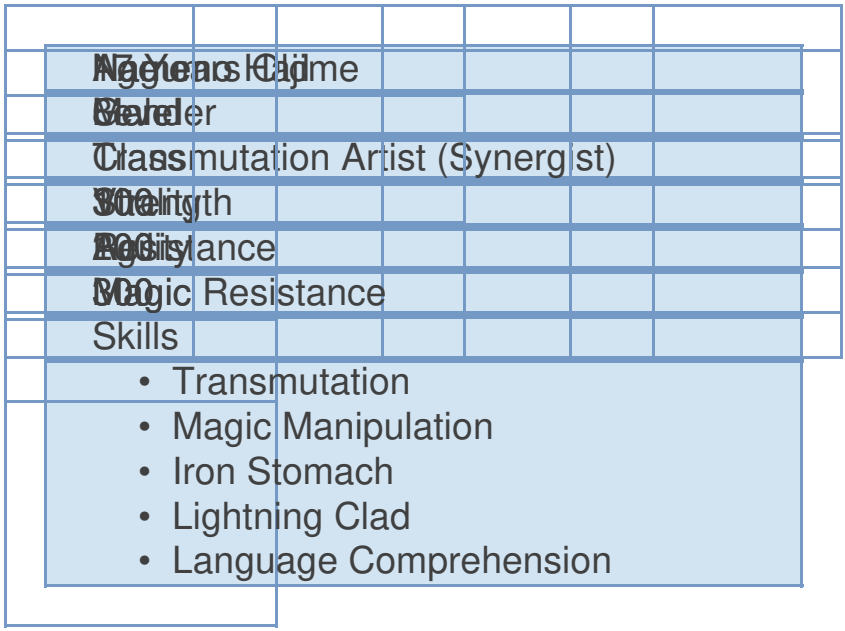
"What happened to my body? There is some strang feeling..."

Not only had his external body changed, but he felt something out of place inside. The strange feeling felt cold and hot at the same time. When more of his awareness came, he focused on the crimson lines on his arm.

"Wow, how unpleasant. Makes me feel like a demon....What a joke. Oh yeah, the Status Plate!"

Exploring through his pockets, he searched for the forgotten status plate. Good thing he did not lose it. There on the plate was displayed Hajime's current condition. Maybe it would show if something was wrong with his body.





"...Say What!?"

Like always, whenever he is astonished he switches to Kansai dialect and performs a Tsukkomi. All his stats had increased significantly, and he had three new skills. He couldn't believe it, and he was still just level 8. Levels were considered the amount of progression a person had, for Hajime, this meant he had a lot of potential to grow.

"Magic Manipulation?"

He wondered if he could directly control magic then. Hajime pondered if the earlier sensation he felt was magic. To verify his thoughts, he concentrated to attempt this "magic manipulation." The crimson lines emerge again when Hajime concentrated on that sensation. He imagined an image where that sensation gathered into his right hand. Slowly the sensation returned and he could feel the movement of magic.

"Whoa!"

When he attempted to raise his voice at the sensation, the magic started to gather around the magic formation on his glove. The

surprised Hajime tried to transmute, and the ground rose easily.

"Seriously? I don't need to chant? But the principle of magic said that direct manipulation of magic was impossible. Only demons could perform it. Maybe after consuming demon flesh I obtained the ability?"

Right on the dot! Hajime had for sure gotten the ability of the of the demons. He wanted to test out "Lightning Clad" next.

"How do I use it? If you mention "Lightning Clad", it has to deal with electricity. Was it what the wolves casted with their tail?"

He tried different ways to invoke it

but nothing changed. Hajime did not know how the magic felt like, so he did not know what to do. Groaning, he remembered when he learned how to transmute, and recalled that imagination was important. Magic was not just about making a magical formation, another part was the image formed.

Hajime imagined an image of static electricity crackling. On the tips of his right hands emitted an electric burst.

"Oh! It came out. Now I see. For demons, the most important part was to imagine its magic."

After he got a hang of it, he repeated created a discharge of electricity. Unlike the wolves, he

could not launch his lightning. Maybe this is why it was called "Lightning Clad", he was able to clad his body in lightning. Practice was necessary to control the current and voltage.

Lastly, the "Iron Stomach" skill. Maybe next time he ate demon flesh, he wouldn't be wrecked with pain. There was no food in the labyrinth. Does he take starvation or the pain? This skill can maybe solve this question for him, and he anticipated it.

Hajime took a piece of wolf meat and fired it with lightning. After his starvation was cured, he did not want to eat raw meat. He fired it until it was brown.

Making up his mind, he swallowed it. 10 seconds...1 minute...10 minutes passed and nothing. Hajime started to grill more meat and consumed them. There wasn't any pain that assaulted him. He wondered if it was because of the skill or had he just developed a tolerance for it. Hajime did not know, but he rejoiced. With this he did not have to taste hell everytime.

Hajime ate until he was full, and decided to return to base. He finally had the possibility to beat that bear demon. Determined, he decided to work hard to develop his new skills.

Other wolves were carved for their meat. Compared to his first time with them, this time it was easy. He returned to the area with the God's

Crystal and created a storage to store the carved meat with this transmuting.

* * *

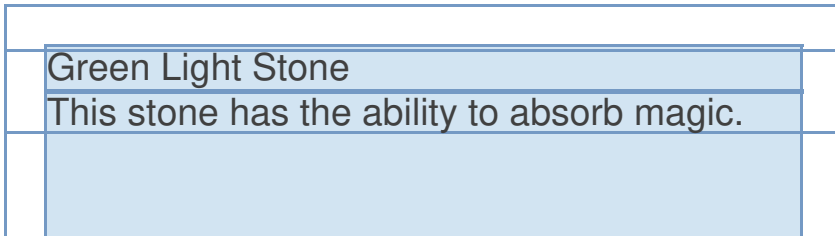
A few days have passed since Hajime returned to the base, and all this time he had been training his transmuting and new skills.

Everything was going well, and all his skills were progressing well. His transmutation skill went through a change. The skill had acquired a derived skill from itself. "Mineral Appraisal" was the name of the skill. In the Royal Capital of the Kingdom, only high-ranking smiths had this skill.

Usually the magical formations

needed to power appraisal magic are much bigger than the formations used for offensive magic. The facilities that could perform these huge magical formations were limited. For those that had the skill, they could easily analyze any mineral with just a chant and magic formation as long as they touch it. This derived skill was acquired by training the transmutation skill for many years, it was not an innate skill.

Hajime decided to check the neighboring minerals with his newfound skill. When a person uses the skill the description will show up on their status plate. For example,



Green light is produced with this saved up magic. If it is split, all the accumulated magic will be released in an instant.

What a very simple description; it did the job though. Hajime grinned and laughed as a thought came up. From here he could search for minerals to make powerful weapons that could be his trump card.

Combustion Stone

An inflammable ore. The structural component is used to fuel the combustion; continuously burning will reduce size until nothing is left. Explosion may occur if many are lit in a sealed area. Its power is equivalent to a higher level fire spell; this depends on the amount and rate of compression used in forging.

When he read the description, he felt a thought develop in his brain. This stone may play a similar role to gunpowder. If this was the case,

then he could create a weapon with extreme firepower with his transmuting. Hajime was excited. There was going to be a lot of trial and error. The amount of effort needed to design it would not be small. Even though his transmuting had saved him many times before, it still lacked a real means of attack; the idea that he would get a real weapon had him rejoicing.

Ten days have passed since he ate the wolf, and finally he had succeeded producing his project.

With an attack that could exceed the speed of sound for a short distance, it was a modern weapon with great firepower. Overall length was 35 cm, it had a revolving magazine that held 6 bullets made

from Tauru Ore; the hardest known ore in this area. The barrel was elongated. Bullets were made using Tauru Ore as the projectile and compressed powdered Combustion Stone was the propellant. Oversized revolver would accurately describe the firearm. Combustion Stone was not the only explosive to propel the bullet. Using his "Lightning Clad" skill, he could produce electromagnetic force to help accelerate the bullet; like a small rail gun. This equated to a power that was 10 times stronger than an anti-matter rifle. He called it "Donner". Hajime wanted to have a partner to rely on.

"I did it! With this I will be able to deal with that monster!"

Hajime had designed "Donner" using modern firearms as the model: he looked at his masterpiece and laughed slightly. This world's craftsmen only knew how to make a good sword or armor. Right now, a new weapon has been created in this world that was ruled by swords and magic.

* * *

Tauru Ore
Hard black ore. Hardness 8 (On a scale of 10 being the hardest). Resistant to impact and heat. Vulnerable to cold. Becomes fragile if cooled. Binds if heated.

Chapter 11: Subjugation of an Arch-Nemesis

Campaign against the Bear.

Hajime is not how he was before!

[Mugu = Chewing sound]

[Ita = Ouch!]

* * *

"Mugu,Mugu...Even the rabbit meat sucks."

Hajime was the person currently eating the rabbit. That's right, the rabbit demon. Once these kicking

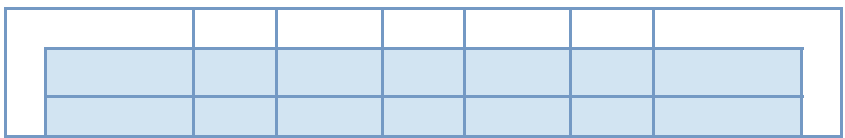
experts looked down on him but now they were just food to him. He had expected the meat to taste better since it was a rabbit, but it was still demon flesh. It was just bad like normal.

The rabbit's whole body was consumed in one sitting. Once he acquired "Iron Stomach", he proceeded to eat as much as he want and could. Hajime was especially hungry after he used his magic. In order to kill this rabbit, he had used quite a bit of power. He wouldn't die since he had the sacred water, but he had to use his power carefully; the starvation sensation that could happen if he overused his power was not something he wanted.

The rabbit was defeated because he had trapped it. Drawing the rabbit to the river was the starting point. When it passed by the river, he sprinkled water onto the rabbit. He produced an overpowered lightning afterwards. Donner was fired upon it and just as expected the rabbit blew up in a cloud of smoke.

A bullet accelerated with electromagnetic force going at 3.2 km per second [Mach 9.3] was pretty hard to avoid; the rabbit's head was blown to pieces when it collided with the bullet. Maybe it wasn't necessary to use the electric shock. Donner's firepower was tremendous.

"This is the first time I ate a rabbit...Status!"



Age: 17 Years Old
Race: Human
Level: 1
Class: Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Strength: 30
Agility: 20
Vitality: 30
Intelligence: 350
Magic Resistance: 50

Skills

- Transmutation
  - Mineral Appraisal
  - Precision Transmutation
  - Mineral Enquiry
- Magic Manipulation
- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
  - Air Walk
  - Flicker
- Language Comprehension

It seems his status goes up when he eats a demon. He noticed that repeatedly eating the same type of demon has a severe diminishing return on the improvements, and eating new type of demons greatly

increased his stats.

Hajime wanted to test out "Divine Step." First, he had to picture an image of the skill, the steps the rabbit made. The focal point was speed; speed so fast that only a blur was seen. He had to guess what [Flicker] did. Hajime remembered that on earth it was known as a famous high-speed movement skill.

An image of the ground exploding from the force of his movement was what he pictured. Magic was gathered instantly to his feet. His step caused a depression on the ground and he vanished. The next time he knew he dived face first into a wall.

"Ita! C-Controlling this is hard."

Still, it was a success. If he kept practicing he should be able to move like the rabbit. With his firearm, this would make a powerful combination.

Next was [Air Walk]. This move wasn't easily activated. Just knowing the name wasn't enough to perform the skill. While trying stuff out, he remembered when the rabbit made a scaffold out of thin air. Immediately, Hajime started to imagine a transparent shield in the air. He leapt at it to test it.

His face dove straight into the ground.

"Guu!?"

Both his hands went up to hold his

face as he trashed on the ground. Writhing in pain, he took a sip of the sacred water to reduce the pain.

"Well, at least I did it..."

The reason he dived into the ground was because when he jump his lower body met the scaffold. What is important is the reason for his stumble. It seems like [Air Walk] was a Special Magic that allowed him to make transparent platforms in the air.

It was great to get two Special Magic in one go; these skills that were derived from "Divine Step." With this feeling he started to train. His goal was the bear. Hajime would probably be able to defeat it with long distance shooting but he

trained just in case. There was the possibility that an even stronger demon could appear. An optimistic person is a dead person in this labyrinth. Once he defeated the bear, he had to search for a way out of here.

Hajime psyched himself up.

* * *

In the labyrinth passage, there was a shadow moving so fast that the only a blurry figure was seen.

The figure was Hajime. Hajime had mastered all of "Divine Step." He quick stepped around the passage. Using his Air Walk he created platforms to traverse on and repeated his high speed movement;

as he searched for his nemesis. Usually a person would prioritizes escaping this area but no matter what Hajime wanted to kill that bear. His heart broke once, he couldn't help but want to fight the monster that caused it.

"Guru-ua!"

When he encountered a pack of wolves; one of them leapt at him. Using a wire he carefully fired off Donner, which was fixed to his right thigh, while he somersaulted in the air.

Bang!

A bullet being propelled by the explosion of the powdered Combustion Stone and

electromagnetic force struck true at its first target. The wolf's head was crushed instantly. Using "Air Walk" he further in the air. He continuously discharged his firearm towards the jumping wolf. All the targets were not hit, but somehow all of his enemies perished before he emptied his chambers.

Hajime placed Donner between his left armpit, and quickly reloaded. He continued on his mission without glancing back at the wolves' corpses.

After killing wolves and rabbits for a bit; he finally found his target.

The bear was currently enjoying a meal. Its meal looked like one of those rabbits. When he confirmed it

was his arch-nemesis, Hajime laughed fearlessly and advanced towards it.

The bear was the strongest monster on this level; you can even call it a Lord. There were many wolves and rabbits on this level, but there was only one bear. On this level the bear was invincible. All of the demons here payed extra attention to avoid it. A full retreat was in order if they ever encountered him; not even one thought of resistance. No one would voluntarily face it.

However, that was exactly was happening in front of its face.

"Yo, Bear. Long time no see. Was my arm delicious?"

The beast narrowed its sharp eyes. What kind of creature was in front of it? Why is it not showing its back? Why did it not freeze in fear or had despair in its eyes? For the situation to not carry out like usually, all the bear could do was be perplexed.

"It's a revenge match. I'll make you understand that I am an enemy, not a prey."

Hajime extracted Donner and pointed the muzzle at the bear. While in that pose, he questioned himself in his mind. Scared? No. His eyes do not fall into despair; his body did not shake in fear. There is only the earnest desire to survive and rid his adversary.

Hajime's lips raise and change into a fearless smile.

"I'm going to kill you then devour you."

At that declaration, he discharged Donner. Bang! An explosive noise echoed and a bullet made of Tauru ore sped towards the bear at over Mach 9.

"Gu-uu!"

The bear instantly threw its body on the ground to avoid the shot. It avoided the bullet it could not see; the evasive action was earlier than the discharge. Most likely it anticipated the shot from the bloodlust coming off Hajime. As expected of the Lord of this level.

For something over 2 m tall, it had a startling reaction speed. It was not able to fully avoided injury, and a part of its shoulder was gouged out; spraying blood onto its white fur.

Anger dwelled in the bear's eyes. He had finally acknowledged Hajime as an enemy.

"Gaaa!"

Roaring, it rushed forward with tremendous speed. Seeing the figure of a 2 m tall beast with spread out stout arms, was a very imposing image.

"Haha! That's it! I'm your enemy! Not some prey you can hunt!"

While taking in the frightful pressure from the bear, Hajime did

not break his smile. Here was the turning point. Thoughts of his left arm and broken heart racked his brain. The cause of his apostasy was going down. A ceremony needed to move towards the future. If he didn't, his heart would not compromise; this he believed in.

The bear comes rushing back. Donner is fired. A supersonic bullet drove towards the area in between the bear's eyebrows, but somehow the charging bear was able to avoid it. How did he have such a reaction for such a massive figure?

When the bear had entered its strike range, it brandished its claws. The Special Magic it had was activated, and its three claws seemed to distort. In Hajime's mind,

the memory of the bisected rabbit that tried to dodge that move; played in his mind. Instead of dodging at the last moment, he choose to back step in full force.

In a grand style, the bear's claws passed the area Hajime left. The claws did not touch the ground at all; three groves were engraved into the ground.

The bear gave an irritated roar at missing his target. Clang-clang, something rolled close to the bear. A dark green ball-shaped object about 5 cm in diameter caught the bears attention as it laid at its feet. The moment the bear was able to study it, the object emitted an intense light.

Hajime had made this flash grenade. The principle is simple. Fill a Green Light Stone's magic to the brim. Coat the stone's surface so the light does not escape. Powdered Combustion Stone is compressed into the center of the flash grenade. A line of Combustion Stone powder is used as a fuse; it leads to the hole into the center compartment. Using "Lightning Clad", Hajime lights the outside powder that will fire up the compressed center. When the ignition reaches the center, we get the explosion. The moment it breaks, the stone will release all the light it had hoarded. Hajime had created the fuse to last 3 seconds. There were a lot of problems, but it was a gem of pride for Hajime.

The bear had never encountered such a weapon, so it was completely blinded for a moment when it stared right at it. While flourishing his arm in chaos, it struggled to roar. Not being able to see anything caused it to panic.

Hajime was not going to let this chance go. Donner was once again fired. The bullet that was electromagnetically accelerated hit the left shoulder of the bear, and blew it away from the base.

"Guru-uaaa!"

A terrified scream originated from the bear when it suffered a never known sensation in its pain free life. Abundant amount of blood started to flow from the wound. The

left arm that was blown off was twirling in the arm, and fell on the ground with a thud.

"Wow, what a coincidence..."

That was not his intended aim. Hajime was still not an expert marksman. He had fought with many enemies that just rushed forward. Unless you had full knowledge of its movement, it was very difficult to fire a pinpoint shot. So the bullet taking the left arm was totally not planned.

Hajime continued to fire at the rampaging bear that had not recovered. Even though the bear was confused, it instinctively reacted to the bloodlust that came with the shot; it jumped to the side

to avoid it. Using his "Flicker", Hajime landed near the bear's fallen arm. To the slightly recovered bear, he lifted the left arm to show it off.

A bit slowly, using his strengthened jaw from consuming demon flesh; he tore into the bear flesh. He was reproducing the nightmare that the bear showed him.

"Mugu...Mugu...As always, it sucks. How is it better than the other though?"

While he said it, Hajime crouches down while being vigilant of the bear. Bear did not move. There was no fear in its eyes. Still, it couldn't move carelessly because of its recovering eyesight and the show

he just saw.

At that intermission, he continued his meal. Then came the incident. The intense pain he felt the first time he ate demon flesh returned.

"Tsu!?"

Hurriedly, Hajime tried to take the sacred water. Though it wasn't as fierce as that time, he could not fully stand; he fell to one knee and his face distorted from the pain. Because the bear had so much more power than the wolf and rabbit; it was going to cause the pain.

The bear did not care about his situation. When it saw the chance, it started to charge again. Hajime did not move from his crouch. At

this rate he would be trampled. When it seemed like it would be a reproduction of their first meeting; Hajime's lips split into a grin.

He put Donner back in its holster, and pressed the ground with his right hand. His hand became clad with lightning. A maximum powered "Lightning Clad" traversed the liquid on the ground. When the bear stepped into the area, the power ruthlessly assaulted him.

The liquid on the ground was the bear's blood. A sea of blood scattered like fountains. Hajime picked up the bear's bleeding left arm, and scattered the blood to the winds. He connected the surrounding blood puddles with his. Eating in battle and showing off

was not something he did. Although he did not factor in the possibility of pain from consuming the flesh. Hajime had already intended to lay a trap for it. He wanted to eat the arm to anger the bear enough to get it to rush straight at him. The plan went a little haywired, but the results were alright.

When the bear stepped into the sea of blood, the strong electric current and voltage violated its body. Nerve to nerve it ravished; grilled the muscles. Even at full power, Hajime's Special Magic fall short of the original. He couldn't launch his lightning and also his output was halved. At this moment, it was enough to temporarily paralyze. It wouldn't be weird if this spell had

enough power to vaporize a human.

"Rugu-uuuu!"

The bear fell down with a thud into a puddle of its own blood. Its eyes were still bright and glaring at Hajime.

Hajime just returned the glare. Slowly he stood up while enduring the pain. Unholstering Donner, he placed the muzzle on the bear's head.

"Become my chow."

After he said his words, he pulled the trigger. The bullet faithfully executed its master's will; it pulverized the bear's head.

The gunshot ripped an echo

through the labyrinth. Not for a moment did the bear takes its eyes off Hajime, not even till the end. Neither did Hajime.

There was no exhilarating feeling like he imagined, but he didn't feel empty either. He just did what he had to. In order to live, in order to earn the right to survive in this area.

Hajime closed his eyes, and faced his own heart. He determined he would live this way. Fighting was not something he liked. Pain was not his ideal companion. Starving was on the last of his to do list. Live, was what he wanted to do. He crushed unreasonableness, like he would to his enemies. All in order to survive.

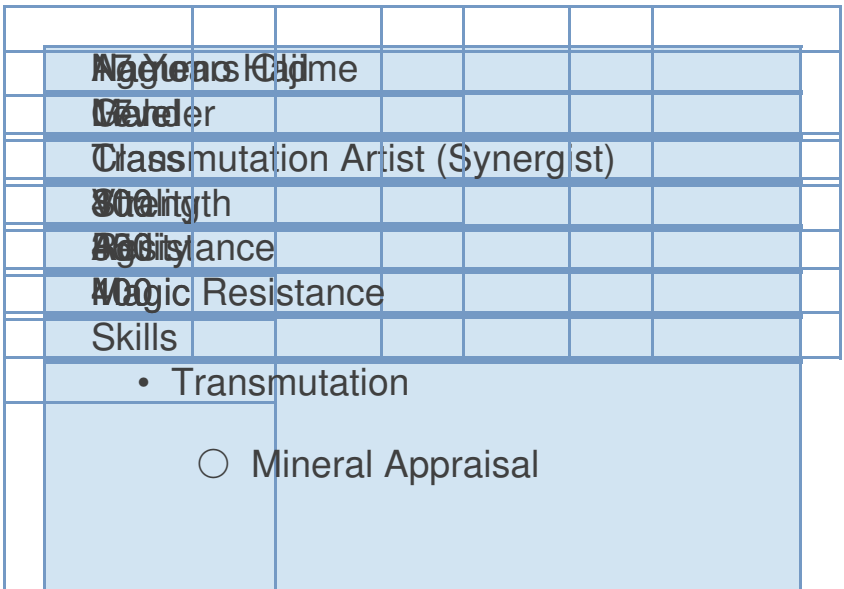
He will live that way....And...Return home.

"Yeah, I want to return. Other things did not matter. I'll find my own way home. I will fulfill my wish. Anyone that gets in my way, no matter the being..."

Hajime opened his eyes and broke into a fearless laugh.

" KILL"

* * *



- Precision Transmutation
- Mineral Enquiry
- Mineral Separation
- Mineral Fusion

- Magic Manipulation
- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
  - Air Walk
  - Flicker
- Air Claws
- Language Comprehension

Chapter 12: Despair and Decisions (Classmate Side 1)

[I probably made some mistake when Shizuku was talking about the classmates thoughts and what they did after Hajime's death. I was really tired when I did this, I'll try to look over it again later.]

* * *

A little back in time.

Hairihi Royal Palace, in a room given to the summoned, Yaegashi Shizuku was staring at her best friend sleep in the dark.

5 days have passed since they had a taste of battle and loss in the Dungeon. When they exited the Dungeon, they stayed overnight at Horald. The party came back to the capital on a high-speed carriage early in the morning. There was no one in the mood to continue the combat exercises in the Dungeon. Incompetence was the cause of death for a brave man. Both the king and church would need to hear the report. They were not allowed to break in this place. Before something worse happened, they needed to care for the party of heroes.

Shizuku remembered when they returned to the kingdom. She wanted to wake Kaori up in the morning, so she went to sleep early.

When they returned the news of Hajime death was reported. Everyone was astonished, but they breathed a sigh of relief when it was the "useless" Hajime that passed. Even the king and Ishtar was the same. There wasn't any of the strong heroes to die in the Dungeon. If they could not return alive from just exploring the dungeon, how would they fight the Devils? The chosen heroes of God must be unrivaled.

The king and Ishtar had discretion. There had been among them that had slandered and abused Hajime. It was not spoken to the public, but it was a talked about in secret in the noble society. They thought it was good that the incompetent one died. An apostle of God that was useless;

naturally they would die. Now they were speaking ill as one pleased. Shizuku really wanted to go berserk and kill those people many times.

Kouki and his strong sense of justice did not stand up against such mistreatment; she thought something was weird. Did he think that if he protested against the king and church, it would leave a bad impression. People who cursed Hajime seemed to be penalized...rumors were spread that Kouki was an anxious brave hero who pondered his incompetence. Hajime's reputation was not going to change just because a few people said so.

At that time, it was undeniable who saved them. Hajime was the one

that kept the Behemoth in check to allow them to escape. To think that he died because of a stray shot from a classmate...though that is what he said.

She did not talk her classmates about her thoughts of the attempted friendly fire at that time. They should have a grasp of their magic, when she tried to approach the suspect it unmentionable because of the countless magic casted at that time. Because it would prove he was a murderer.

To escape reality, she wondered what Hajime did to cause such a thing. Dead man tell no tales. Rather than look for the culprit recklessly, if she left it alone than it would be done. The classmates

opinion was in harmony and they did not communicate it.

To clarify the details at the time, Meld thought it was necessary to interview the students. Just like the students he choose to escape from reality, even if it was hard to regard as a mistake. Even if it was negligence he carried it out for the benefit of the students. To leave such a thing unsettled would only bring trouble later on. Above all, Meld wanted to make clear. Meld failed his promise to save Hajime and his heart ached at that.

Meld action did not come true. Ishtar had banned any scrutiny of the students. Meld clung to it, but even the king forbid it.

"If you knew, you will get angry."

Kaori had not woken up since that day. There was no abnormalities discovered by the doctor's diagnosis. The body, probably because of mental shock, went into a deep sleep as a defense mechanism. Time will pass normally if they sobered up.

Shizuku held Kaori's hands. She prayed to not let her best friend hurt anymore.

Kaori's hand twitched at that.

"Kaori! Can you hear me!? Kaori!"

Shizuku desperately called out. Kaori's closed eyelids started to shiver. Further, Shizuku called out for her friend. In response to that

call Kaori gripped her friend's hand, then she slowly awoke.

"Kaori!"

"...Shizuku-chan?"

Learning on the bed, Kaori saw Shizuku overlooking her with tears in her eyes. Kaori just blindly looked over her surrounding. Shizuku looked at her and waited until Kaori gathered herself more before calling her.

"Yeah, its me. Kaori. how is your body? No discomfort?"

"I'm fine. Just weary because I was sleeping..."

"Well, you have been sleeping for 5 days..."

Shizuku forced a smile and tried to assist Kaori in standing up, who was trying to ask Shizuku how much she slept. Kaori reacted at that.

"5 days? Why...I...I went to the Dungeon...and then..."

Her eyes gradually came into focus. Shizuku tried to change the topic when she had a bad feeling. However, Kaori recalled her memories too fast.

"And then...Nagumo-kun..."

"...That is."

Shizuku's face morphed into a painful expression when wondering what she should tell her. Kaori realized the tragedy in her

memories when she saw the state Shizuku was in. However, it wasn't easy for her to accept such a reality.

"...Lies. Isn't it? Shizuku-chan. When I fainted, you guys saved Nagumo-kun, right? Right? Isn't it? This is the castle room. Everyone came back, right? I wonder if Nagumo-kun is training. In the training center. I'll head over for a moment. I have to thank Nagumo-kun. Say something, Shizuku-chan..."

Kaori who wanted to escape from the harsh reality spun her words over and over again; while she mention about searching for Hajime. Shizuku caught her arm and didn't let go. She had a sorrowful expression, but still she

stared at Kaori.

"...Kaori, you understand, right?...He's not here."

"Stop..."

"Kaori, remember."

"Please, stop..."

"He, Nagumo-kun..."

"No, stop...please, stop!"

"Kaori! He's dead!"

"Wrong! He can't die! He absolutely can't have! How can you say such a horrible thing? Even if it's Shizuku-chan, I will not forgive!"

Kaori shaked her and started to

escape from Shizuku's grasp. Shizuku did not let her go and embraced her. She was trying to nurse Kaori through her hug.

"Let me go! Let me go! If I don't search for Nagumo-kun! I beg you...he is absolutely alive..let me go~"

Kaori dropped her face into Shizuku's chest while shouting "Let me go!" and sobbed. Clinging to each other, she started to shout louder. Shizuku just continued to hug her. Hoping it would soften just a little of her pain.

How long did they stay like that? The sky was dyed red by the setting sun. Kaori was motionless in Shizuku's arms while she sniffed.

Shizuku asked in worry.

"Kaori..."

"...Shizuku-chan...Nagumo-kun...He fell...He isn't here..."

Kaori whispered in a voice so quiet it sounded like it would disappear. Shizuku did not want to sugar coat it, it would only be a temporary comfort. The lie could come back and hurt more than it was softened. She did not want to see her friend in pain.

"That's right.

"That time, whose magic hit Nagumo-kun? Who?

"I don't know. No one wants to mention that moment. Its scary.

What if it was me...."

"That so."

"Do you have a grudge?"

"...I'm not sure. If someone knew...I will surely blame them. But...no one knows...I think this is better. For sure, I wouldn't be able to stand it..."

"I see..."

Kaori looked downcast as she talks. She wiped her face and eyes and faced Shizuku, and declared resolutely.

"Shizuku-chan. I, I don't believe it. Nagumo-kun is alive. I don't believe he is dead."

"Kaori, that is..."

Shizuku had another sorrowful expression trying to persuade Kaori. Kaori clasped Shizuku's cheeks with both hands, and said with a smile.

"I now. I know its weird to think that someone could survive that. ...But its not like we checked. The possibility is less than 1%. If we did not check, its not 0%. I'm going to believe."

"Kaori..."

"I'll become stronger. I'll become strong enough to prevent an event like that from happening. I will make sure with my own eyes. Nagumo-kun's fate....Shizuku-chan."

"What?"

"Please help me."

"..."

They both stared at each other. Kaori's eyes did not show any signs of insanity. She will not give up until she genuinely find out. This kind of Kaori will not be moved. Kaori is known for being stubborn when she gets going.

Usually, you wouldn't take what Kaori said seriously and let it go. Believing that someone could a fall into that abyss was just crazy. Everyone would try to correct her. That's why...

"Of course, I'll agree. Until you are satisfied I'll tag along."

"Shizuku-chan!"

Kaori hugged and thanked her. Shizuku said "No need more thanks. What are friends for?" The title of Samurai Girl wasn't just for show.

At that time the door opened.

"Shizuku! Kaori woke up..."

"Oh, How are you, Kaori?"

It was Kouki and Ryutaro. They had come to check on her. Training had just finished and they choose to come here afterwards. From "that" day, they concentrated even more in training. Wonder what they thought of Hajime's death. They reluctantly withdrew and wanted revenge. Hajime was the one that saved them from a crisis. Never will they

be that useless again.

Two more people entered that caused them to stiffen. Shizuku was doubtful.

"You guys, how did..."

"S-Sorry."

"W-We got in the way."

They quickly left the room and didn't answer her question. She finally became aware of what they saw. Kaor was staring at them blankly. Shizuku noticed the cause.

Currently, Kaori sat on Shizuku's knee, while she had both hands on her cheeks. It looked like they were about to kiss. Shizuku was supporting Kaori but it looked like

she was embracing her.

This scene looked like a Yuri scene and it was splendidly done. If this was the manga world there would be flowers blooming in the background.

Shizuku sighed deeply. She couldn't bare the situation so she yelled.

"Hurry up and get back here! You freaking fools!

Chapter 13: Path of Escape

[6 Tatami sized = 2.73 m x 3.64 m]

[Sizes of rooms in Japan are often measured in the number of tatami (Straw mats) it can hold. So when you mention a 6 tatami sized room, the room could fit that many on the floor. Tatami sizes vary between different regions of Japan, but Nagoya's standard is about 1.653 square feet.]

[Itadakimasu = Thanks for the meal (At start of meal).]

[Gochisousama = Thanks for the meal (After meal).]

* * *

"Damn it, there is nothing..."

Three days after killing the bear. Hajime has been searching for an escape to the upper levels. He had already searched about 80% of the level. After eating the bear, his status had risen. There were no longer any wonders here, he had vastly explored the area with a quick pace. However, nothing was found even though he searched so much.

No, saying he didn't find anything was misleading. Hajime had found stairs two day ago; that led downwards into the higher number floor. A floor should always have a stair that led up towards the surface

but this one did not have one it seemed.

Why not make a road to the upper level? This method was ignored after already trying it. Within a certain range, his transmutation did not work on the walls. While on the floor he could freely transmute, the very top and bottom of the floor had some kind of protection. This "Orcus Dungeon" was created during ancient times and it was full of mysteries. When he encountered anything new, it wasn't that unexpected.

That is why he was looking for a way up, but he had to make a decision if he did not find it. To venture further down this Dungeon or not.

"...Dead end? At this point I searched all the branchings. I wonder what happened."

Hajime decided to stop looking for a way up and breathed out a deep sigh at that decision. He proceeded to advance towards the room that contained the stairs leading deeper into the Dungeon.

The stairs looked like it was sloppily made. It would have been more correct to call it an uneven slope, rather than stairs. He looked ahead to the stairs and noticed that it exudes a creepy atmosphere; with its complete darkness where no Green Light Stone was present. Like a mouth of a huge monster swallowing him up. Hajime felt that once he went in, there was no

coming out.

"Ha! Bring it on! Anything getting in my way, I'll kill and devour."

While thinking about such an idea, Hajime laughed through his nose and smiled. He stepped towards the darkness with no hesitation.

The level was very dark. Although that was expected for an underground dungeon, but all the previous levels he visited had Green Light Stones in them. It wasn't like he was devoid of all vision. This level really did not have any light source. Hajime choose to rest for a bit to allow his eyes to get used to the darkness. He was expecting to see a little more, but there was no difference. He decided to take out

his Green Stone lamp from his improvised back, that was connected to a wire made of out of the bears fur.

It was suicidal to have a light in this darkness if a monster was attracted to it. However, he couldn't continue if he couldn't see. Hajime did not want to occupy his only hand to hold this lamp, so he fastened it to his left elbow.

He had a feeling that something was shining in the depths of the passage when he walked for a while. That got him to raise his caution to the max. Advancing while hiding as much as possible, he left an unpleasant sign on his left side. He pointed the lamp at that direction. A gray liard

approximately 2m in length was sticking on the wall, glaring at Hajime with golden eyes.

The golden eyes were charged with light. In that moment,

"Tsu!?"

Hajime left arm started to give of a strange sound and noticed it was getting petrified. Instantly the lamp that was fastened to his arm was soon petrified completely, and shattered into a million pieces. With the light source lost, darkness ruled the area again. The petrification on his left side was already reaching his shoulder.

Hajime clicked his tongue while he took out some sacred water from

his chest holster; which was made from demon fur and wire. As expected, the petrification halted and eventually his left arm returned to normal.

It sure had done it! He cursed inwardly, and took out a flash grenade from his waist pouch. Hajime threw it towards the gold eyed lizard. At the same time, gold eyes started to simmer again in the darkness. Hajime left the area by using "Flicker", and did not see the gaze. The rock that was behind where Hajime used to be, changed color. Soon the rock crumbled as it weathered. Wicked Eyes of Petrification, was what Hajime linked with the golden eyes. This lizard was like a basilisk often seen in a RPG.

Hajime closed his eyes while he took out Donner and brandished it.

Bang! The surrounding was bathed in intense light as the flash grenade went off.

"Ku-ua!"

For an entity that matured in the darkness, this was the first time it had experienced that much light, and it confused it. The figure of that confused basilisk emerged from the darkness. Hajime fired without a thought. He aimed well and soon the bullet found its target in the basilisk's skull. Brain matter splashed against the wall as the head was blown to pieces. The bullet continued through the head into the wall, and burning rocks

could be heard. Since electromagnetic force was used to accelerate the bullet, the places it hit emit a high temperature. It was so intense a heat that, right now, only the Tauru ore could handle it.

Hajime approached the basilisk while he stayed vigilant to his surroundings. Promptly he cleaved the meat off of the corpse and left the area. He did not feel safe eating in an area with so little visibility. Hajime decided to push forward and continue his search for the time being.

He had searched for many hours but he could not find the stairs. A lot of ores were collected and demons killed during this time. Since it was so inconvenient to

carry all this, he made a base for himself.

When he found a suitable place, he used his transmutation to create the space. He was able to make his base without any problems. Hajime continued transmuting until he had a 6 tatami sized room. Without forgetting, he placed a pale basketball sized ore in the hollow recess of the wall. This ore was God's Crystal. Underneath the ore was placed a contained to catch the dripping water.

Hajime had started to call the crystal "Potion Stone" and the sacred water as "Potion." It really was like the games equivalent, but its effects were much stronger.

"Well, let's have a meal."

Hajime retrieved the meat out of his backpack. He used his lightning powers to cook them. Today's menu was the basilisk meat, an owl that could fire its feathers like a shotgun, and a six legged cat. No seasoning.

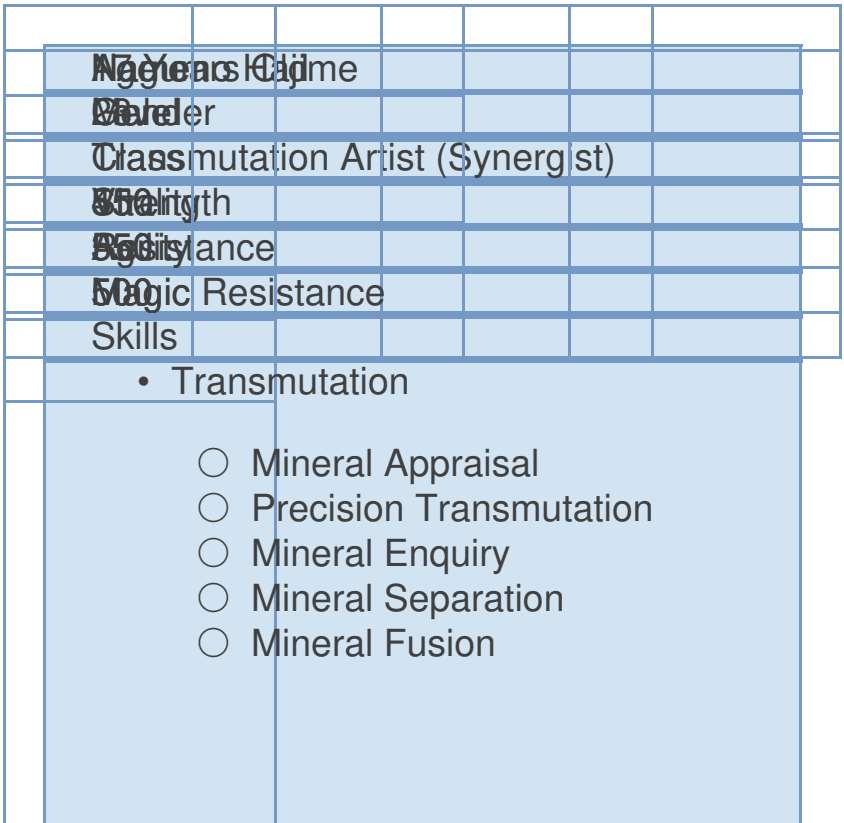
"Itadakimasu."

After a moment of eating, pain started to well in his body. The body was being strengthened. It seemed that these monsters were stronger than the bear. It was certainly true that the environment and darkness made it troublesome. Hajime did not really feel that since Donner could blow any of them away.

Drinking the "Potion", he continued to eat while ignoring the pain. His phantom limb pain had returned and it was getting stronger.

"Chomp, Fuu--. Gochisousama. Now then, Status..."

He took out his Status Plate as he said that. Hajime's current state was...



- Magic Manipulation
- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
    - Air Walk
    - Flicker
- Air Claws
- Night Vision
- Perception
- Petrification Resistance
- Language Comprehension

His stats had risen just like expected. He also had acquired three new skills. That was when he noticed that he could see the surrounding more clearly. This seem to be attributed to "Night Vision." The dungeon had a gloomy disposition, and on this level it was an advantage. The rest were passive skills. Regrettably, the skill he got from basilisk was "Resistasnce" and not the actual "Petrification" skill.

The Wicked Eyes of Petrification! He was disappointed he missed out on such a cool skill.

Hajime started to transmute in order to replenish his consumables. Just to make one bullet, he needed a lot of concentration. The process needed ultimate precision. It needed to fit perfectly into Donner's firing ring. How much propellent needed was carefully compressed and measured. One single bullet would take 30 minutes to make, and he thought he was pretty good at the process already. He admired himself for being able to display such tremendous power in his time of life and death.

His power was frightening but it needed a lot of time and effort to

use. He wasn't dispirited because he could practice his transmutation while making it. Thanks to all this bullet-making, he was able to remove impurities and separate minerals easily; fusion of minerals were easier too. The only comparison to Hajime's transmutation skill was the head crafter in the Kingdom.

Hajime continued his transmuting in silence. He had still not advanced down a level. There was no idea where this abyss would lead to. When the transmuting was done, he planned to continue with his search. Returning home as soon as possible was his mission. Hajime made an expression as he declared that mission to himself. In that dark abyss with the pale light from the

"Potion Stone", a resolute face could be seen.

Except for the times he needed to replenish his supplies at base; Hajime continued his exploration. It was not known when he rested as he searched through the huge labyrinth. The darkness no longer mattered with his "Night Vision", and he was able to sense any being in a 10 m around him because of the "Perception" skill. With these skills, he was able to speed up his search.

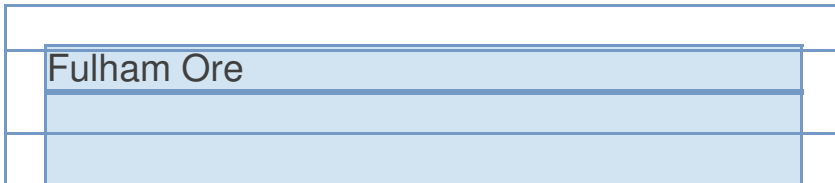
Finally, he had found the stairs. He took the stairs down without any hesitation.

On this level, the ground seemed to be some kind of sticky quagmire. It

was extremely hard to move his stuck feet. Frowning, he created platforms to walk on with his "Air Walk" and continued his search.

Hajime advanced while checking the surrounding minerals with his "Mineral Perception" skill. He found one interesting mineral during his investigation.

[Quick note, you can see that he does not have this skill listed in his status. The actual skill name in kanji does not show up in the page either. So, this means one of three things. The author forgot to include the skill or its a collaboration of "Perception" and "Mineral Enquiry". The last possibility is that he misspelled the skill.]



Black shiny ore. When melted it becomes tar-like. Melting point at 50°C. In its tar form, ignition point at 100°C. Heat from ignition can reach 3000°C. Burning time is dependent on amount of tar.

"...No way."

Hajime drew a stiff smile and rose his foot up slowly. He stepped on the tar-like liquid on the floor a few times, and it dripped from his boots. This tar-like liquid covered this whole level floor and its what made it seem like a quagmire.

"I-I can't use my gun..."

Although he didn't believe his gun could produce 100°C in heat, he did not want to chance the chain ignition of 3000°C on this whole level. Even with the "Potion", he wasn't sure he would survive.

"I can't use my railgun or "Lightning Clad"."

Donner was a powerful weapon. Even without the electromagnetic force, it produced enough power from the Combustion ore. At least when considering normal demons. For example, against Traum Soldiers it would be enough for this weakened Donner to deal with. It may even deal some damage to a Behemoth. Demons in this abyss are a total different story. The monsters in the higher number floor were just animals. Can he really defeat the demons on this floor with only his handicapped Donner?

When that uneasy thought went through his mind, the corner of his

lips angled up.

"That's fine, it doesn't change what I need to do. Just kill and eat."

Hajime continued his exploration after sealing his "railgun" and "Lightning Clad".

A three-way intersection came into view after traveling for a bit. He stepped towards the left passage to check the nearby walls.

At that moment,

Clash!

"Tsu!?"

A shark-like demon jumped out from the tar; displaying its huge mouth lined with sharp teeth. It

closed the gaping jaw at Hajime's head. Promptly, Hajime bent over and dodged the jaws, but it left him shuddering.

("Perception" didn't pick it up!)

Ever since he got the skill, Hajime had been constantly been using it. The skill should be able to pick up any monster within 10m of him. However, he was unable to sense that shark at all.

With a kerplunk the shark had returned into the tar, and Hajime could not sense it again.

(Shit! I really can't sense him!)

Hajime grinded his teeth at this incomprehensible state of affairs. He stopped to quickly use his "Air

Walk" skill.

As if aiming for that timing, the shark jumped out again.

"Don't underestimate me!"

Hajime fired at the shark that was midair when he jumped and somersaulted. Air is torn apart as the bullet was shot from Donner, but it wasn't enough to eat through the enemy. The shot was exquisitely time and hit the shark in the back.

However,

"Crap! Is this how its going to be?"

The bullet was like rubber to the shark, and it only dented the scales as it was repelled. Its scales seemed to be able to mitigate physical

impacts.

"Gu!"

Using the momentum it had, it jumped into the tar. The shark inverted itself marvelously and aimed at the area Hajime would land after his somersault. Hajime was able to dodge somehow by twisting his body, but the shark got a small part of his flank. With a shock, Hajime tell into the tar. He quickly stood up and jumped into the air; with his whole body dyed black by the tar. The shark emerged from below Hajime's previous spot and smashed its jaws together.

Hajime developed a cold sweat as he was jumping through the air with "Air Walk". Even if he was

being cornered, his face was still smiling.

"Bring it on!"

He never stopped moving as he used "Air Walk"; he was looking for a chance to attack. Showing the concentration that was forged by training his transmutation. As his concentration rose, he tuned out all other unnecessary thoughts and surroundings. Even if "Perception" couldn't sense it, that was no problem. Originally he did not even have that skill. The shark will definitely show up when it attacks.

Hajime continued jumping around while concentrating. Abruptly one of his steps broke his balance. The shark did not overlook this chance,

and pounced from behind in Hajime's blind spot.

"Simplicity, helps."

Immediately, Hajime rebuilt his broken balance. With the shark perched up in the air as it attacked. Hajime took out Donner with his right hand.

Blood splashed to the floor as the shark's flank was torn and falls on the tar. The shark struggled as it splashed in the tar.

Hajime had purposely shown a weakness to lure the shark in, so he could time and place his shot. He had not shot Donner regularly; he had infused the magic "Air Claws" into the bullet. The skill he got from

the bear.

Approaching the downed shark, Hajime brandished Donner towards its head. With "Air Claws" he bisected the shark's head. Although he couldn't produce three claws like the bear, but its sharpness far surpasses any famous swords of this world. This magic was very useful if they got in proximity.

"So, lets check why I can't sense it."

Hajime licked his lips as he said that.

After carving the shark of its meat and securing it, he continued his exploration till he found stairs.

Chapter 14: The Sealed Room in the Abyss

*There was a description with this sentence but I did not know how to translate it. The literal translation was a monster like G black kitchen. I thought it was maybe referencing something from monster hunter because of the G, but I did not know what to make of the black kitchen.

* * *

Hajime's walkthrough of the Dungeon continues.

Since the tar level, he had advanced

50 levels deeper. Because Hajime did not have a sense of time there, he did not know how much time had passed. But the progress he was making was being done in an astonishing speed.

During that time, he was in a desperate struggle. Countless times he had encountered stronger demons and battled for his life.

For example, one level had a thin poisonous fog covering the whole floor. There was a 2m frog (Rainbow colored) that spit poisoned sputum at him, and a moth that spread scales that caused paralysis. If he didn't drink his "Potion", he would have died just from being on that level.

The iridescent frog's poison was an agent that targeted the nerves and lit it up with pain. His experience with the pain was comparable to the pain from his first taste of demon flesh. He would have died if he didn't consume the "Potion" in his molar. Hajime had placed a small chewable container behind his molars that contained "Potion". He was happy he prepared just in case of emergencies.

Naturally, he had consumed two of them. There was friction when he ate the moth, because of the supercompensation pain, he resolved it by consuming the "Potion". Vexed at the fact that the moth tasted better than the frog.

There was also a floor that looked

like a dense forest, how it came to be in an underground labyrinth puzzled Hajime. Hajime thought this was the most unpleasant place so far because its extremely hot temperature and dense humidity. The demons of this level were a huge centipede and sentient trees.

When he was traversing the jungle, a huge centipede suddenly fell from atop the trees. Hajime felt sick at the sight of it, and developed goose bumps on his whole body. Each time a section it was hit, it would separate. Fight one of these centipede was like fighting 30 monsters*. Donner was blazing from use, but there were too many for it to deal with. Reloading was taking too long, so he switched to his "Air Claws". He even started to

throw inexperienced kicks because of how desperate he was. After this encounter, Hajime was determined to develop his speed loading and kicks. This was decided while he was washed away the purple fluids from the centipede.

The tree demons were like Treants from RPG games. Its underground roots would thrust out from the ground and vines acted as whips for them. However, the biggest feature of the treants were not these trivial attacks. When they were in a pinch, they would hurl the red fruits that littered their heads. There was not any offensive ability to it, but Hajime though to try it out. He was rigid for a few dozen minutes. It was not a poison. The fruit was insanely delicious. Sweet and fresh

the red fruit was comparable to a watermelon. Not an apple.

The unpleasantness he felt on this level was blown away. Every thought vanished from his head temporarily. After many dozen days he had eaten something other than meat. Hajime's eyes were completely of a hunter, his prey were these treants. After he was satisfied he continued his journey, though the treant-like demons almost went extinct.

With that feeling he advanced through 50 levels. There is still no sign of an end. Hajime's current status...

Name	Nagumo Hajime
Age	17 Years Old
Gender	Male
Class	Transmutation Artist (Synergist)

Strength	350
Agility	360
Magic Resistance	760

Skills

- Transmutation
    - Mineral Appraisal
    - Precision Transmutation
    - Mineral Enquiry
    - Mineral Separation
    - Mineral Fusion
    - Replica Transmutation
- Magic Manipulation
- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
    - Air Walk
    - Flicker
    - Grand Legs
- Air Claws
- Night Vision
- Far Vision
- Perception
- Magic Perception
- Hide Presence
- Poison Resist
- Paralysis Resist
- Petrification Resistance
- Language Comprehension

Hajime was inside the base he created for this 50th level. He was stacking up his training for his transmutation, firearm technology, and kicks. Even though he had discovered the next stairs, he did not take them. Because he had discovered a foreign area on this level.

The space around the area was eerie. At the end of this side area was a solemn majestic double door about 3m in height. On the flanks of the doors were two one-eyed giants sculptures enshrined into the walls; only their upper bodies were sculpted it seemed.

Chills ran down his whole body the moment he set foot there. Temporarily he had a dangerous

feeling about this. He did not have the intention to avoid this and prepared his equipment. Eventually a "change" appeared. Do not go and check it.

Hajime was feeling expectation and unpleasantness at the same time. If he opened the door, he was sure that a disaster was waiting to meet him. However, a new wind blew into this Dungeon.

"As if it was a Pandora's box...I wonder what aspiration it contained."

His current possessed weapons, martial arts, and skills. One by one he checked and prepared them to make sure they were in perfect condition. When he finished this

task, Hajime unholstered Donner. He closed his eyes gently. Already he had decided to be resolute. It wasn't bad to repeat his resolution. Hajime looked into himself and took an oath.

"I am going to survive and return home. To Japan, to home...I'll return. Those who are obstacles are enemies. To enemies...kill!"

Hajime opened his eyes and daring smile graced his face.

Vigilantly, Hajime came to the rooms with the door and advanced. Without incident he arrived at the door. More and more wonderful decorations could be seen on the door as he neared. At the center, two magic formations were drawn

in the recesses.

"I don't understand. I've studied a lot, but I have never seen these formulas."

When he was called incompetent, Hajime had laid emphasis on knowledge to make up for his low physical abilities. He didn't finish learning all he could, but it was weird that he had never seen any magical formulas like the ones presented to him.

"Is it an old system?"

While guessing, Hajime examined the door, but he was not able to understand anything new. Because it was very important, he was alert for any traps. Hajime was not going

to be able to decipher any of this with his current degree of knowledge.

"Can't be helped. Let's go with the usual transmuting."

He tried to pull and push the door to no avail. As usual, he tried to force a way in with his transmuting. Hajime put his right hand on the door and started to transmute.

However, immediately...

Crackle!

"Uwa!?"

A red electric discharge runs through the door and into Hajime's hand. Smoke bursted out from his hand. Swearing, he quickly

swallowed some "Potion".
Immediately an accident occurred.

Ooooooooh!!

Suddenly, a deep voice cry echoed throughout the room. Hajime gained some distance from the door by backstepping. He placed his hand on his waist holster to prepare to use Donner at anytime.

The cries continued to echo, and the identity of the voice began to move.

"Well, that was a cliche of a cliche."

While Hajime was muttering and smiling to himself. The sculptures of the two giants that flanked the door started to crumble. Gray skin that was assimilated with the wall

soon turned dark green.

The one-eyed giant looked exactly like a fantasy cyclops. A 4m large sword appeared in its hands, though he didn't know where it came from. It turned its eyes towards Hajime and was freeing its buried lower body to eliminate the intruder.

At that moment,

Dopan!

A bullet made of Tauru ore, which was accelerated through a railgun, pierced the cyclops only eye. It stirred around its brain for a bit before it bursted out of its head, and pulverized the back wall. The left cyclops blankly stared at what

happened to the dead cyclops. After it was shot, the cyclops body was still convulsing, while it lean forward and fell. The shock created from the impact shook the whole room, and thick dust danced around the room.

"Sorry, I'm not the type of bad guy to sense the mood or wait around."

Exactly like a devil. No, given the carnage Hajime experienced it was just a natural reflex. Still...pity for the cyclops (right).

Probably, it was a guardian for the door that is sealing something. Furthermore it was in a place at the bottom of the abyss, there wasn't many visitors. When it finally answered the call of duty. Maybe it

was filled with joy. Without even seeing much of the other party, its head was blown apart. If you can't call this pity, what would you call it?

An expression of horror was on the cyclops' (left) face as it gazed at Hajime. Its eyes seemed like it was conveying "What the heck did this guy do?" Hajime was glaring at the unmoving cyclops. The cyclops did not know what guns were so it stayed vigilant and lowered its waist to prepare to move at any time. Soon a roar escaped from its lips, as the cyclops lost its temper at the unmoving Hajime.

Shortly after, its face dived to the ground.

The moment it stepped forward it lost strength in its leg and fell forward. Confused, the cyclops tried to violently stand up and to move, but he couldn't gather any strength.

Hajime slowly approached the growling cyclops. The steady footsteps were like a countdown. Taking the gun he placed the muzzle onto the cyclops head. Click, the trigger was pulled without hesitation.

Dopan!

A gunshot resounded through the whole room. However, an unexpected event happened. The cyclops body illuminated for just a moment, and in that moment its skin cause the bullet to repel.

"Mu."

Hajime guessed that it used Special Magic. Its inherent magic was increasing its defense significantly.

His mouth contorted at the fallen cyclops that he thought was foolish. Hajime took the muzzle away from the cyclops and drove a kick into its head. "Grand Kick". The kick he delivered was just as beautiful as the kick from the rabbit. It forced the cyclops to face up on its back. Again, the muzzle was pressed against its exposed eye.

Hajime felt like the cyclops was saying "Wait a moment" but he ignored it and pulled the trigger. As expected, the bullet penetrated through its head; guess it wasn't

able to strengthen its eye.

"Hmm, Approximately 20 seconds. A little slow...because of the size?"

Hajime watched the cyclops to analyze the experimental result. Why did the cyclops suddenly fell over and was unable to move? Because of the "paralysis grenade". The grenade was made by gathering the scales from the moth and placing it in a grenade. It is then released from the grenade with a small-scale blast; the results could be seen on the cyclops. When the cyclops (left) started at the other cyclops was the time Hajime released his grenade.

"Well, its okay. I'll harvest the meat later..."

Hajime considered glancing at the door. Using "Air Claws", Hajime took the magic stone out of the cyclops body. Without minding the blood, he craved both cyclops for their magic stone and approached the door to compare these fist-sized stones to the two recesses. They were a perfect fit.

Instantly, red magic sprouted from the stone and poured into the magic square. The light settled after a moment and an opening sound could be heard. Simultaneously, the magic speared into the surrounding walls and emitted light; like Hajime had not seen in a long time.

Hajime's eyes twinkled a little, he cautiously and quietly opened the door.

There was not a single source of light behind and door. Darkness spread in the big space the room had. With the help of his "Night Vision" and the new lights, Hajime was able to make out the room little by little. Two columns of pillars lined up all the way into the depths. The room was made from finely crafted marbles and it looked similar to the Church room they were first summoned into. In the center of the room was a huge cube of stone that reflected the incoming light and lustered.

Hajime was staring at the cube, when he noticed that something was growing in the front center of the cube.

Trying to confirm what he saw,

Hajime pushed open the door and checked the vicinity. Like a horror film, the door would slam closed when you were in trouble.

However, before Hajime could fix the open door, it moved.

"...Who?"

A husky voice belonging to a frail girl. Hajime stared at the center of the room in surprise. The early "growing" was now moving. With the light finally piercing the darkness, the identity of it was exposed.

"Its...a human?"

The "growing" was a person. Only the face could be seen, every other part was buried in the cube. Long

blond hair hung down around the woman, like a ghost from a certain horror film. Pupils of red was peeping from the gaps of hair, just like a low-altitude moon. From her looks, she looked around 12-13 years old. The dangled hair looked haggard, but it still had a beautiful appearance.

Hajime unexpected stiffen, her red eyes was staring at him. Hajime took a deep breath and with a determined expression said:

"I'm sorry. I was wrong."

Chapter 15: Cheater Rather Than a Hero

"I'm sorry. I was wrong."

As he said it, Hajime tried to quietly close the door. The blond hair red eyes girl panicked and tried to stop him. Her voice that had not been used for years got blurred into a mutter; though her desperation was conveyed.

"W-Wait! Please! Save me..."

"Nope."

Hajime said that and continued to close the door. Is a devil.

"W-Why? I will do anything."

The girl was desperate. Only the head was seen, but her face was enough to transmit her feelings. Hajime responded in a gloomy manner.

"Hey, this is the bottom of the abyss. I cannot possibly release someone that has been sealed in here. It would be absolutely dangerous. With the exception of the seal, nothing else is here...there isn't anything to help you escape. For that reason..."

His argument was sound. He wasn't a normal person that would respond to the pleading voice of a captured girl and release her without any hesitation. Original-

gentle Hajime would have surely helped her.

Being so coldly refused, the desperate girl raised her voice as she was on the edge of tears.

"No! Cough...I'm not bad!...Wait! I'm"

Hajime kept closing the door unaltered. A little time before it was completely closed, Hajime started to grind his teeth. If he had had only closed it faster, he would have heard...

"I was just betrayed."

The closing door that only had a small crack, stopped when the girl's cry reached it. Only a little light got through the crack into the dark

room. 10 second, then 20 seconds pass. Finally the door started to open again. Hajime stood at the doorway with a sour face like he had been bitten by 100 bugs and chewed up one.

He did not have any intention to help her. There must have been a suitable reason to be sealed in here. There was no evidence to prove that there wasn't any danger. Being deceived by a wicked being was a highly likely possibility. It was appropriate to forsake her.

"I wonder what I'm doing."

Hajime sighed inwardly. His heart had shaken when she said "betrayed". The past should have been behind him. In this place,

trying to fulfill his wish to "live" was extremely difficult. Grudges were unnecessary distraction. If her words could affect him this much, there was probably a part of him that had not moved on. Parts of Hajime's consciences probably still existed if he could sympathize with the girl that had the same circumstance as him.

Hajime scratched his head while he walked up to the girl. Of course, he wouldn't lower his guard.

"You said betrayed? I don't believe that is the reason you were sealed. If what you said was true, why did the betrayer seal you in here?"

The girl was stunned when Hajime came back. Through her abundant

dirty blond hair, her red eyes stared at Hajime. Hajime got irritated with her lack of response. "Hey. Are you listening? If you are not going to talk, I'm leaving." As he said that he turned heel. Surprised, she gathered herself and begun telling the reason for her sealing.

"I'm an atavistic vampire...I was granted great power...because of it I worked hard for my country. But...one day...all my retainers...told me I was not needed anymore. Uncle...became my king...I was fine with that...However, I was dangerous because of my powers... they couldn't kill me...so they sealed me...in here."

She talked desperately and bit by bit it became dried. Hajime groaned

while he heard the story. Seems like the circumstances was full of drama. There were a few things that bothered her. He inquired as he suppressed his boiling emotions.

"You, what royal family are you from?"

"...(Hypnotized)"

"What do you mean can't be killed?"

"...Automatic regeneration. Injuries heal immediately. Even if decapitated."

"...T-That's amazing...is that your great power?"

"Not just that...Magic, direct manipulation...also don't need formation."

Hajime understood that. Magic manipulation came to him after he ate the demons. Incantations and magical formations were useless to him for strengthening his body. He did not need incantations for his transmutation or other skills. In Hajime's case, it did not changed his dependence on hugh magical formations to use regular magic, because of his zero aptitude. His direct magic manipulation did not help in that regards and this made using regular magic for him impractical. If she had any magical aptitude, she could use some very powerful magic and she would be able of foul play. While other people would be preparing their chants and magical formations, she could just launch a spell at them without them expecting it.

Honestly, it wouldn't be a contest. Also, immortality. It probably was not absolute, but it still was a cheat better than a hero.

"...Help me..."

While Hajime was thinking to himself, the girl pleaded with him.

"...."

Hajime motionlessly watched the girl, and she returned it. How long did they stare at each other...He sighed and scratched his head, and put his hand on the cube that sealed the girl.

"Ah."

The girl noticed the meaning and opened her eyes wide. Hajime

ignored her reaction as he concentrated on his transmutation.

Crimson colored magic discharged from him. His magic had changed after he ate the demons. However, the cube was resisting Hajime's transmutation. It was exactly like the bedrock at the top and bottom of a level. The cube was not completely immune to it. Little by little, Hajime's magic started to erode areas around the cube.

"Ku, resistance is strong....but, the present me!"

Hajime started to spend more magic. The equivalent to a six phrase incantation. Finally, the magic penetrated the cube's defense. As for the surroundings, it

was bathed in crimson light of Hajime's magic.

Hajime needed more magic. He poured 7 phrase...8 phrase...The stone around her seal started to tremble.

"Still more!"

He fired himself up as he poured 9 phrase worth. If it was an attribute magic, it would already be a grand level spell. No, the amount of magic maybe was even more. The crimson light continued to rapidly grow brighter. Vampiress kept her eyes opened as she stared at the brightness and Hajime.

Sweat started to drip from his body, this was Hajime's first time using

such a large-scale magic. If his control slipped for just a moment then his power would go on a rampage. Even with all this power the cube did not deform. Hajime was desperate; he had released all his magic.

Hajime did not understand why he would do all this are a girl he just met. He couldn't help it because he didn't want to leave her alone. Already, Hajime had decided to dedicate his life to eliminating all his enemies and getting home but...he asked himself "What are you doing" inwardly. He wanted to treat everything with a clear solution. He became serious.

His body started to emit a red light. Genuinely, he was going to release

all his magic. All of his magic was poured into his transmuting to fulfill its goal!

The cube around the girl started to melt and little by little, she was getting being released from her shackles. Soon, more and more parts of her got free. Her swollen chest came to bare, then her waist, arms, and thighs. Under those cubes, she was wearing nothing. Even though her body was emaciated, she still had a mystique beauty to her. She dropped into a childish seat after all her body was set free. Her body seemed to lack the energy to stand up.

Hajime also sat down. His shoulders and breath huffed and puffed. A heavy sense of fatigue hit

him when he felt his empty magical reserves. With his wild breath and shivering hands he reached for his "potion", but the girl clenched his hand. A hand that lacked any power; small and trembling. When Hajime glanced at her, she was staring at him. Her face was in an expressionless state, but her eyes told the real story.

With a small and trembling voice, she clearly said.

"...Thank you."

What sentiment was he to give to her thanks? Deep within his supposedly blackened heart, there was a small light that did not disappear.

Holding each others hands tightly. How much time passed? From Hajime's knowledge, vampires died out several hundreds of years ago. He remembered reading about it when he was studying the history of this world.

Even while she talked her expression did not change. In other words, she had long forgotten how to talk and express herself with other people. She had spent a long time in this darkness all by herself. Betrayed by the people she trusted. The girl did well in not going insane. Maybe it was because of her automatic regeneration. However, it could be considered a torture with it. Because it did not allow her to go mad, she had to experience everything and remember it.

Being able to drink the "potion", a wry smile showed on his face afterwards. He returned to grasping her weak hands. She responded back with her own grip.

"...What's your name?"

The girl asked Hajime with a whisper. Hajime finally noticed that they had not introduced themselves.

"Hajime. Nagumo Hajime. Yours?"

She muttered "Hajime" repeatedly. Like she was etching it into her mind as something important. To the asked question, she answered it with a question.

"....Name, grant me."

"Eh? What do you mean grant you? Don't tell me you forgot your name."

Hajime asked her if it was because of the long imprisonment, but she just shakes her head.

"I don't need my previous name anymore. The name Hajime grants me is good."

"...Ha, even if you say that."

Most likely she was dealing with the same thing as when Hajime changed. Throw away your previous self; live a new life with new values. Hajime was changed due to pain, hunger, and hatred. She wanted to change out of her own free will. The first step was to get a new name.

Her eyes was shining with anticipation. Hajime scratched his head while thinking there was no helping it. He told her the new name.

"How is "Yue"? I don't really have a sense for naming, if you want a different one..."

"Yue?...Yue...Yue"

"Ah, I didn't mean Yue [romanji]. From my hometown the name means "Moon". When I first entered the room, I thought those eyes that shined through your blonde hair looked like the moon floating in the night...how is it?"

The girl was surprised by the response he gave and just blinked

her eyes. As expected, her face remained expressionless but her eyes shined with joy.

"Yeah, from now on I'm Yue. Thank you."

"Oh, for the time being..."

"!?"

Yue undid their clasped hands and looked at Hajime. He started to take off his overcoat and gave it to her.

"Wear this. You can't stay naked forever."

"..."

Yue reflexively took the offered overcoat while she looked at her state. She was really stark naked.

All of her important parts were completely exposed. Hajime's overcoat was quickly wrapped around her, while she turned bright red. Yue looked up at Hajime and murmured.

"Hajime's a pervert."

"..."

Hajime choose to stay silent, because saying anything would just make it worse. The overcoat was cheerfully put on by Yue. She was only 140 cm tall, so the overcoat was oversized for her. Her hands held the hems of the coat with a pleasant expression on her face.

During that moment, Hajime was drinking his "potion". His vitality

restored and his brain active again. Using "perception"...he froze. There was a sense of a terrible demon in the immediate area.

The location...right above!

When Hajime had noticed its presence, that was the moment it dropped from the ceiling. With every ounce of effort he picked up Yue and used "Flicker". After executing his movement, he looked back at where he was. A thud came from the area he came from and saw what it was.

The monster's body was 5m in length. It had 4 huge-long-shear-like arms and 8 legs rustling around. A sharp needle was present on its two tails. Scorpions would be

the best comparison to them. As for the two tails, it would be wise to assume it is poisonous. Hajime felt that compared to all the other demons he had faced so far, this one was clearly a strong warrior.

Sweat streamed down his forehead. When he had entered the room earlier, his full powered "Perception" did not pick up anything; now it was going crazy. This meant that this scorpion-like demon was released after he released Yue's seal. The last resort to prevent her escape. If he had left Yue by herself, he could most likely escape.

He set his glance to the girl in his arm. She was earnestly watching Hajime, and not minding the

scorpion. Her eyes were like a calm water surface; resolving herself. The eyes that conveyed her feelings with eloquence. Yue had entrusted her fate to Hajime.

The moment their eyes met, the corners of his mouth rose, and his usual fearless smile came into being. Hajime, who did not care about others, felt sympathy for Yue. Light stilled remained in his mostly broken heart. For this betrayed girl, he would commit himself. If he couldn't reply to her pleas, he wasn't a man.

"Bring it on! Try to kill me if you can!"

Hajime quickly took his "potion" out from his pouch, he embraced

her and fed some of it to Yue; who was perched on his shoulders.

"Umu!"

The sacred water flowed into her body from the test tube-shaped container. Her eyes watered at being force fed an alien substance, but was surprised when her vitality was being restored.

Hajime moved Yue from his shoulder to his back with his hand. Her feet were still weak, but it would recover soon. He did not want to fight while having to protect her.

"Hold on tight! Yue!"

Her body was far from recovered, but she used the power that

returned to hold on tight to
Hajime's body with her limbs.

The scorpion started to make noise
as it advanced towards them.
Feeling Yue's grip on his back, he
declared with his bold smile.

"If you're going to get in my way...
I'm going to kill then devour you!"

Chapter 16: Demon of the Sealed Room

A purple liquid jetted from the needle on the scorpion's tail. Hajime jumped aside at once. The floor started to dissolve when the purple liquid splashed onto it. Seemed it was an acid.

After he looked around and confirmed his surroundings, Hajime discharged Donner.

Dopan! (Bang)

Donner was shot with maximum power. A bullet going 3.9km per second smashed into the scorpion's head and exploded. The passenger

on his back was shocked. She had never seen such a weapon; a weapon that could attack at a flash. There wasn't even any sign of magic. Some static could be felt around his right hand but there was no incantation or magic formula. Yue noticed that Hajime was the same as her. He was able to directly manipulate magic. The same as her and somehow he was in this abyss. She wasn't sure if that was the case, but she had tuned out the scorpion and Hajime.

Hajime was continuously moving around with his "Air Walk". On his face was a grim expression he never had before. Using his "Perception" and "Magic Perception", he noticed the scorpion wasn't moving.

To prove to him, the needle on one of the tail aimed towards Hajime. The tail enlarged for just an instant and the needle was shot with a tremendous speed. When Hajime was about to dodge, the needle exploded in mid air and turned into a buckshot.

"Ku!"

Hajime groaned out while he emptied Donner, swept with his "Grand Kick" and chopped with his "Air Claws". Even with the pressure he was able to get a shot off from Donner. He threw Donner into the air after firing it and hurled a grenade from his pouch.

Once again, the scorpion endured the shot from Donner. It was

preparing to unleash its acid and buckshot again. Before it was ready, a grenade approximately 8 cm in diameter rolled near it and popped. The grenade scattered burning tar onto the scorpion.

Hajime called it an "incendiary grenade". The reagent used to cause the scorching was the Fulham ore Hajime had found on the tar level. With its ability to burn at 3000 degree celsius and its easy ignition, it was the perfect choice.

The "incendiary grenade" was almost extinguished as it had burned through the tar. Smokes were coming off the scorpion and it appeared to be damaged, but it had also made it angry.

"Kishaaaa!!"

Using its 8 legs, it rushed forwards fiercely while it screamed. The four arms it possessed elongated like a cannon shot and sped towards Hajime.One of the arms he shook off with "Flicker" and another he leapt away from using "Air Walk". The third arm was smacked away with "Grand Kick, his posture was thrown off balance and the fourth arm was about to hit him. Donner was suddenly shot, and using the force from the shot he was able to twist his body to dodge the attack. All those move put a lot of pressure on Yue, but she was able to tolerate it and held on.

While in the air, he leapt onto the scorpion's back. Hajime was able to

balance himself on the raging scorpions back and fired his Donner at point-blank.

Zugan!

A terrible explosive sound ripped through the area, and the monster that had taken that explosive attack slammed into the ground. However, only the crust was scratched and no real damage was done to it.
Grinding his teeth, he prepared his "Air Claws" with Donner. When his ability clashed with the scorpion's armor it only made a clink; no damage was seen on it.

Fed up, the scorpion aimed its tail and shot its needle.

Hajime immediately jumped aside

with a twist. He fired at the point where the needle was launched. The bullet hit its target at the tail and caused the tail to flick, but still there was no damage because of the outer shell. He was lacking offensive power.

The beast's four arms started to attack the aerial Hajime like a storm. In desperation, Hajime quickly leap backwards as he threw an "incendiary grenade" at the scorpion's back. Once again the tar scattered over the scorpion, but this was only going to work as a delay.

When he was thinking about what to do at this point, an unprecedented scream came from the scorpion.

"Kyiiii!!"

Chills ran through his body and immediately he tried to retreat with "Flicker"; it was too late. The surrounding terrain started to waver and countless splinters ejected from the ground.

"Damnit!"

This was a complete surprise. Hajime was going to desperately escape into the air, but he twisted his body to protect Yue from an approaching splinter. This action caused his balance to be broken. He was able to dodge using Donner and "Grand Kick". When he was dodging at the edge of his vision he saw the scorpion preparing its acid and buck shot.

Hajime's face drew stiff. With its preparation done, the scorpion fired its attacks. He steeled himself. In this situation, dodging both of them was impossible. Hajime clenched his teeth. Using "Air Walk", he was able to dodge the acid. Quickly after he started to protect his body. His left arm went to his heart and his right arm to his face. Hajime used his magic to strengthen his body to the limit. Then dozens of needles pierced into this body.

"Gaaa!!"

Any fatals injury were avoided while he screamed. Since Yue was on his back, he decided to take the needles and stop them with his body. Hajime was blown away from the impact, and rolled onto the

ground; while intense pain wrecked his body. Yue was flung away from his back by the shock.

While dozens of needles were pieced into his body, Hajime took out a "flash grenade' and lobbed it towards the scorpion. The grenade drew a parabola, and flashed right in front of the scorpion's eyes.

"Kyishaaa!!"

Blinded by the sudden flash of light, the scorpion instinctively stepped back. It had been tracking Hajime's movement from the beginning. The beast had judged which step to take and it didn't make a mistake.

Hajime pulled out the needles stabbing his body and consumed

the "potion" pill near his molar.

"Guu!"

A groan leaks between his gritted teeth. Hajime looked for Yue while pulling his needles, but Yue found him first and came towards him.

"Hajime!"

Yue ran up to Hajime anxiously. Her expressionless was gone; she was ready to burst into tears.

"I'm fine. His armor is too hard. I can't think of a strategy....his four arms also cover his mouth and eyes...kamikaze?"

Despite Yue's worries, Hajime continued to mull over the scorpion. Looking at Hajime, she

started to cry.

"...Why?"

"Ah?"

"Why don't you just run?"

If he left her, he might escape. Yue brung up the topic because she knew it was possible. However, Hajime had an amazing gaze.

"What are you saying now? Just because a slightly strong enemy showed up, don't give up."

In order to survive, Hajime was willing to do anything: bluffing, lying, surprise attacks, foul play, and whatever is needed to win. His fight with the bear was the only exception, he basically thought you

could take "fair play" and shove it up your ass. This was not the place for such a naive thought. There is not guilt here. You have to live this way.

But he wasn't going to allow himself to become heartless. He still knew right from wrong, humanity and justice. The reason he remember these and regained them was because of Yue. That was why, he had no choice but to save her. She had entrusted herself to him. The moment he accepted that he could not become heartless.

Yue nodded at him as she understood more than what he said, and she embraced him.

"H-Hey, what's wrong?"

This situation is not time for such a thing, what is she doing? The scorpion was going to recover soon. His wounds had healed. Preparations were needed to get him combat ready. Yue didn't care about that and placed her hand on his neck.

"Hajime, please believe."

Yue kissed Hajime's nape after she said that.

"Tsu!?"

No, not a kiss. He was bit. Hajime felt pain at his neck. There was a discomforting feeling as he felt power being extracted from him. At that feeling, he tried to shake free, but he remember that Yue

introduced herself as a vampire. She was sucking his blood. Saying "please believe" while said vampire sucked your blood was scary, even if he did not like it he couldn't just run away and complain about it.

Hajime just gave a wry smile and supported Yue by embracing her. For a moment, Yue trembled but soon she buried her face into his nape and hugged back more tightly. Maybe it was just his imagination but he thought she was delighted.

"Kyishaa!!"

The roar of the scorpion echoed. It had recovered from the "flash grenade". Ground waves formed again; it seemed to know where they were. Probably this was its

Special Magic, the ability to manipulate surrounding terrain.

"But that's my forte."

Hajime put his right hand on the ground and transmuted. A stone wall 3 m tall formed around Yue and Hajime.

The conical splinters struck at Hajime from all around but his defensive wall stopped them. Each time the splinters hit the wall was broken, but soon Hajime would make a new wall to replace it. As far as scale and strength, the scorpion was better than Hajime. However, Hajime was faster than the scorpion. It seemed that 3m was the limit of his range, the thorns were not able to fly, so it acted as

Hajime's defense.

Hajime was concentrating on defending with his transmutation, and Yue finally released her mouth from his neck. She licked her lips with a delirious expression. He felt fascinated though she had a childish figure. Her skin that was previously haggard completely disappeared and now her skin was glossy like white porcelain. Colored returned to her cheeks, and it looked dreamy rose red. Crimson eyes emitted a warm light. Her thin-small hands caressed Hajime's cheeks.

"...Gochisousama."

She slowly rose her hand towards the scorpion.

One word was muttered.

""Azure Sky""

A pillar of bluish-white flame 6-7 m in diameter formed overhead of the scorpion.

Just from being around it the scorpion screamed as it was being burned and retreated. However, this Vampire Princess of the Abyss wouldn't allow it. A beautiful finger extended gracefully like a baton. The pillar of flame carried out its conductor's instruction without fail. It pursued the escaping scorpion then....a direct hit.

"Gu-ugyiyiaaaa!"

A never heard before scream escaped from the scorpion. Agony

filled the scream. The pillar exploded into a flash of light and everything was blinded by it. Hajime just looked at the sublime magic in utter amazement while he protected his eyes with his arms.

Soon, the flames disappeared and the magic was finished. There in the center was the figure of the scorpion in an anguish pose with its outer shell melted from the flames. The outer shell that didn't even melt at 3000 degree celsius, the same shell that didn't crack when fired upon by a rail gun. Should he praised Yue, who had defeated such a monster so easily? Or should he praise the durability of the scorpion who took such an attack and was still intact? He was in a dilemma.

Hajime heard a sound that pulled him away from the astounding sight. Yue was sitting down while breathing heavily. She seemed to have depleted her magic reserve.

"Yue, are you alright?"

"...Superlative...Tiring."

"Haha, you could do it! You saved us. I'll take care of the rest. Take a break."

"Go for it."

Hajime shook his hand and used "Flicker" to shorten the distance. The scorpion was still alive. While the outer shell was melted, it roared with anger, and aimed a buckshot at the approaching Hajime.

A "flash grenade" was quickly thrown by Hajime. He fired a shot from Donner before the needle could be fired. The "flash grenade" is shot through by the bullet, which wasn't accelerated by electromagnetism, and exploded. Familiar with the experience, the scorpion gloomily searched for Hajime in the area painted with light.

No matter how much it look, it couldn't find Hajime. The scorpion was perplexed at losing Hajime's sign. Then Hajime landed on its back.

"Kishua?"

An astonished voice raised out of the scorpion. It was wondering how

a sign that disappear suddenly appear on its back. When the "flash grenade" went off, Hajime had used his "Hide Presence" to cut off his sign and arrive at the scorpion's back.

Hajime was burnt a little as the outer shell of the scorpion was still red hot. He didn't care about that. Donner was pressed against any thin area on the shell and emptied its chambers. The armor's original durability had already been lost. In response to the zero distance shooting from a railgun, that absolute shield crumbled.

The scorpion lashed out its two tails without any care if it hit itself, but Hajime moved faster than it.

"I'll still eat you."

Hajime took out grenades from his pouch and forced them down the holes he had created with Donner. Sticking his arm into these holes he left the beast a party gift. Doing this caused his arm to be burnt but he didn't care.

Before he could be attacked by the scorpion, he evacuated with "Flicker". The scorpion turned towards Hajime to attack again.

However, its time was up.

Goba!

A muffled sound of an explosion coursed through the area and at the same time the scorpion trembled. Hajime and scorpion was facing

each without each moving, and the silence between them continued.

Slowly, the scorpion started to slope. It flopped onto the ground with a thud.

Hajime approached the unmoving scorpion. He placed Donner into the beast mouth and fire it 3 times to make sure;when he was satisfied he nodded to himself. For sure its dead. This is the policy he came up with these days.

Looking back, there was Yue sitting there staring at Hajime with an expressionless face but her eyes was somehow joyful. He did not know when his journey through the dungeon will end, but he seemed to have acquired a reliable partner.

Pandora's box was said to have contained disaster and a handful of hope. Apparently, this metaphor he made before he entered the room, had hit the mark. Hajime walked to Yue while he thought of this.

Chapter 17: Chat at Ease

Hajime had brought back materials and meat from the scorpion and cyclops back to his base. He was struggling with the bulk. When the exhausted Yue got to taste blood again, she revived in a flash and her body displayed a splendid strengthening as she got back her superhuman strength. The two were able to bring the items back.

They could have used the sealed room, but when it was proposed Yue adamantly refused. No wonder. It was natural to hate the place you were sealed up into for so long. When he replenished his supplies

they would not be able to move, so the sooner they left the better for her mental health. At the moment, they were talking each other while they resupplied.

"So...in conclusion Yue is at least 300 years old?"

"...Breach of etiquette."

Yue watched Hajime with reproachful eyes full of criticism. A talk of age seems to be a taboo for any woman in any world.

From his memories, Hajime remembered that the vampire tribe perished after a massive war 300 year ago. Yue probably did not know her real age because there was no sense of time in the dark

room. It wouldn't be surprising if she didn't know how much time has passed because of the sealing. She was sealed when she was 20 years old, this would make her a little over 300 years old.

"Do all vampires live long?"

"I'm special. "Regeneration" prevent my aging."

At the age of 12, her direct magic manipulation and "Auto Regeneration" woke up and stopped her aging. Because common vampire tribes consumed blood, they lived longer than other races. Still 200 years was the limit. Humans lived on average for about 70 years. Devils around 120 years. For demi-humans it depended on

the tribe. Elves could live for several hundred years.

Yue was considered one of the strongest in only a few years after she awoke her atavistic powers. At age 17 she suited to the throne. The magic that had melted the scorpion's shell was shot in no time. She also had an almost immortal body. To the point she would be called "God" or "Monster". Yue said that it was the latter. Her uncle who was blinded with greed, spread rumors around to view her as a monster. They tried to kill her for a "just" cause, but her "Auto Regen" didn't allow her to die. That was when they choose to seal her instead. She was shocked with the sudden betrayal. Too confused, she did not resist and they placed the

seals on her. She regained herself when she was in the sealed room. That is why she did not know about the sealing method, scorpion, or location of her sealing. Hajime thought he found someway home. He was disappointed.

They talked how Yue's powers. She seemed to have an aptitude to all the attributes. Hajime was amazed with her cheat, but she mentioned she was weak in close combat. All she could by herself is run around with her strengthened body while she rapidly fired off spells. Because she had such power magic, it wasn't that big of a handicap.

She was able to use magic without any incantation, but she mentioned the names from habit. There were a

lot of people that used speech and behavior to clarify the image needed to supplement their magic. Yue was not an exception.

Her "Auto Regen" can be classified as a Special Magic. If her magic remained, she would not die unless they could disintegrate her into dust in an instant. Conversely, any injuries she suffered while her magic was depleted could not be healed. Her magic had been drained after all those years of being sealed. Yue would have died if the scorpion had hit her.

"So...it is a crucial discussion, do you know anything about this place? Any escape routes to the ground."

"...I don't know. But..."

She also seemed to not know anything about this labyrinth. While apologetic, she continued her story with what she knew.

"...It is said that one of the traitors made this labyrinth."

"Traitors?"

Hajime stopped his transmutation work at the unaccustomed word, and glanced at Yue. She was watching him work and when he stopped she looked up at him. He nodded to her to continue with her story.

"Traitors...they were the followers of God that challenged him in ancient times....they created it to

destroy the world."

Since Yue was an expressionless girl who didn't talk much, her explanations took time. Hajime still needed more time to resupply. He realized he needed to develop new weapons to combat his weak offensive ability that was evident in the fight against the scorpion. While working carefully, he was poised to listen to her.

Yue continued with her story. 8 of them existed. 8 of them rebelled against God to destroy the world. However, when they failed they fled to the ends of the world. The places they fled to were the current 8 Great Dungeons. One of them was "Orcus Dungeon", the current Dungeon they were in. It is said that

in the deepest part of the abyss was where one of the traitor lived.

"...If it is there, there will be a road out..."

"I see. I did not think that this abyss was created with such great effort. If it is a magician from the age of gods, it wouldn't be surprising that they had some transportation magic to lead them out."

Hajime loosen his cheeks when the possibility was present. He returned his eyes back to his hand and continued his work. Yue's eyes returned to his hand too, and stared.

"...Is it that interesting?"

Yue just nodded at that question.

The image of her wearing that oversized coat and having her small hands hold her knees was charming. Her unbelievably well-featured appearance combined with her cuddle-ability made her really cute.

(But she is 300 years old. As expected of another world. Loli-baba is real...)

Even if his personality had changed, he still had his Otaku knowledge. As he unintentionally thought that unpleasant thought, Yue reacted to it.

"...Hajime, you just thought of something strange."

"Nope, nothing."

Pretending ignorance was too late, he started to sweat because of her sharp woman intuition. He tried to deceive her by working quietly. Yue left that when she wanted to ask a question.

"Hajime, why are you here?"

It was a natural question. Here in this abyss. Unless you were a demon, this wasn't a place to live in. Yue wanted to ask about so much. Why can he manipulate magic directly? Why can he use magic that are like Special Magic? How can he eat demon flesh and be okay? What happened to his left arm? Is he human? What weapon is he using?

Bit by bit, Hajime answered the

questions dutifully. He might have been craving for a conversation after all this time alone. The conversation went on and Hajime did not even look troubled at her questions. Yue was probably someone Hajime wanted to be sweet on. Maybe she was the last resort to prevent his complete fall into heartlessness. He felt that about her unconsciously.

Hajime started with when his class was summoned to this world. How he was called incompetent by everyone. Next was his battle with the Behemoth and the betrayal of his classmate that caused him to fall into this abyss. Eating various types and amounts of demons. The desire to fight the bear. What the potion could do. He talked about

how he developed the weapons by basing them on weapons he seen at his homeworld. Sniffles could be heard from Yue gradually. What? When he looked at her, she was weeping. Startled, Hajime instinctively reached out and wiped off her tears.

"What happened suddenly?"

"....Kusu...Hajime...painful...just like me..."

Apparently, she was crying for Hajime. He started to stroke her head with a bitter smile after he got over his shock.

"Forget about it. The business with my classmate is inconsequential. Don't worry about the small stuff.

After getting my revenge, then what would I do? Rather than that, I want to put all my energy in surviving and finding a way home."

While a snort sounded, Yue who looked like a pleased cat at the caressing Hajime was doing, she reacted to his words of returning home.

"...Going home?"

"Yeah? To my original world? Of course. I want to return...I changed a lot but...home...I want to return home."

"...I see."

Yue looked down with a sunken expression. Then muttered to herself.

"...I don't have a place...to return..."

"...."

Hajime started to scratch his head with his retracted hand that was brushing Yue's head. He wasn't that dense. Yue was looking for a new place to belong, is what he felt. That was the reason she wanted a new name. If Hajime left this world, Yue would be alone again.

Hajime thought to himself: "Even after I decided to only reach my goals, I guess I'm still soft," while he stroke Yue's head.

"If thats so, want to come with me?"

"Eh?"

Yue opened her eyes wide in

surprise at Hajime's words. He couldn't came down after he saw the red eyes wet with tears. This caused him to speak rapidly.

"No, I mean, to my homeworld. A world with only average humans, though it would be tight without a family registration...also with my state. I'm not sure what will happen...but if Yue wishes for it."

Yue was stunned for a while, but eventually her mind caught up. She timidly asked "is that okay?" Her eyes couldn't hide the expectations dwelling in them. The eyes were sparkling and Hajime nodded. Like until now her expressionless was a lie, a smile bloomed on her face. Hajime was mesmerized. When he noticed himself he panicked and

shook his head.

Unable to look at Yue, Hajime devoted himself to his work. Yue took great interest in his work. The amount of distance between them shortened. Hajime persuaded himself to not mind it.

"...What is this?"

Little by little Hajime was finishing different parts with transmutation. On the side there was a 1 m long cylindrical pipe, a red bullet about 12 cm in length, and others parts scattered around.

This was the weapon Hajime started to develop as his new trump card, since Donner was lacking in necessary power.

"This is...An Anti-matter rifle: Railgun version. You saw my gun, right? This is a more powerful version. The bullet is specially made."

When all the parts were assembled, the rifle's full length was 1 m 50 cm. Hajime was considering what he could do to increase the firepower of his guns. Electromagnetic acceleration and combustion charge was the limit for Donner. Donner couldn't be improved by much anymore because of its design. So he had to make a new gun.

Naturally the answer to increase the power was a bigger caliber, and also lengthen the barrel for acceleration. He arrived at an Anti-

matter rifle. It could only load one shot but its theoretical power is enormous. Donner already has a destructive power 10 times of that a regular gun. A monster gun that would crush a normal persons body if they shot it.

The gun's name: Schlagen. In theory, it was 10 times more powerful than Donner...theoretically. Scorpion shell was the material used to make it. When he had analyzed the shell with "Mineral Appraisal" it said this...

Stall Ore
High magic affinity. A special ore where its hardness is increased by the amount of magic power used.

This ore was probably how the

scorpion had such a hard shell. It probably had an enormous reserve of magic to fuel his armor.

If it was ore, then Hajime could process it. When he tested his transmutation on it was simple. With his transmutation it was possible to breakthrough it. He remembered how hard it was to deal with when he fought the beast.

Hajime had his hands on a lot of good materials to work with, so he guess it worked out. Using these materials he started his development of Schlagen's barrel. Since he had become a lot more skilled than when he made Donner, the work progressed smoothly.

He obsessed over the bullet. The

bullet that was made out of Tauru ore was coated with Stall ore. It could be called a full metal jacket-like. In each cartridge a suitable amount of ratio and compression of combustion powder was installed. In one stretch, with [Replica Transmutation], he was able to mass-produce the bullets with ease.

Hajime talked with Yue while he carefully worked, then Schlagen was finished. The gun had a very powerful and brutal form. He was satisfied with himself and the gun. After he finished the gun, he noticed that he was hungry now. They decided to have grilled scorpion and cyclops meat for a meal.

"Yue, meals ready...is it bad? Would

eating this meat cause any pain...are vampires fine with it?"

Demon meat had become the daily meal. Hajime invited Yue to eat with him, but was wondering if it was alright for her to eat it.

Yue shook her head to say: "I don't need the meal" to Hajime.

"Well you have been sealed for 300 years without eating and lived...Don't you feel hungry?"

"I feel it...but I'm okay."

"Fine? Did you eat something?"

Hajime looked at her belly with a questioning gaze. Yue pointed to Hajime.

"Hajime's blood."

"Ah, my blood. That would mean that a vampire's whole meal is blood?"

"...We can also eat...but drinking blood is more effective."

Seems that as long as they drank some blood, vampires were okay with it. She had sucked Hajime blood earlier and was satisfied. When he was convinced with the answer he looked at Yue. For some reason Yue was licking her lips.

"...Why are you licking your lips?"

"...Hajime...delicious..."

"D-Delicious you say. I thought that I would taste bad considering I've

eaten so much demon flesh."

"...Mature taste..."

"..."

From Yue description, his blood had a heavy, deep taste similar to a soup. His soup was a dense one filled with many kinds of vegetables and meat. The first time he had his blood sucked, she fell into a trance. This wasn't his imagination. Any dish would be the finest after starving for so long.

Hajime wanted to stop her bewitching lip licking. He realized Yue was older. However, that did not calm him when he saw that childish figure displaying such an immoral act, such a supreme

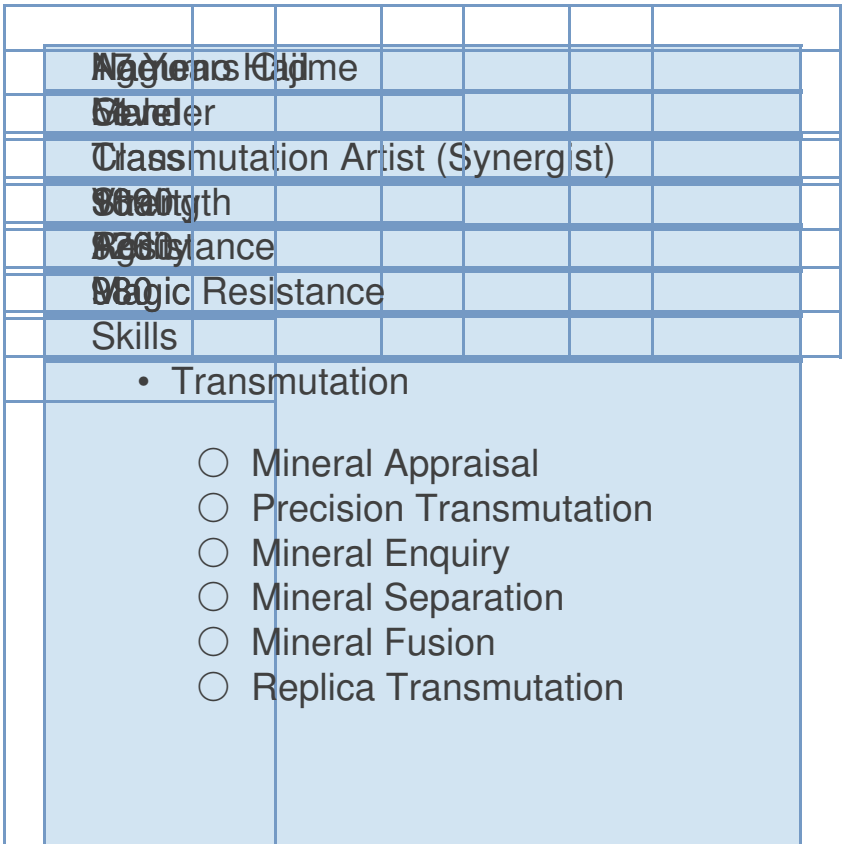
combination.

"...Delicacy."

"...Please pardon me."

His partner might be a little dangerous in many ways. Hajime broke out a cold sweat.

* * *



- Magic Manipulation
    - Magic Emission
    - Magic Compression
- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
    - Air Walk
    - Flicker
    - Grand Legs
- Air Claws
- Night Vision
- Far Vision
- Perception
- Magic Perception
- Hide Presence
- Poison Resist
- Paralysis Resist
- Petrification Resistance
- Varja
- Magic Penetration
- Language Comprehension

* * *

Omake (No relations to the main story)

"...Tsk."

"K-Kaori? You clicked your tongue..."

"Eh? What's the matter Shizuku-chan?"

"N-No. Nothing..."

"...Thieving Cat."

"Kaori!?"

"Fufu, its all right, Shizuku-chan. I felt like someone was threatening my position."

"I don't think its all right then...."

Chapter 18: Second Nightmare - Part 1 (Classmate Side 2)

The day when Hajime met Yue and had their desperate struggle with the scorpion.

Kouki's group, the Hero party has once again came to "Orcus Dungeon". The party was just Kouki's group, and a small rogue group. The group of 5 boys and girls were lead by Nagayama Jugo, a big judo guy.

The reason was simple. Even if they did not talk about it, Hajime's death had cast a shadow over their hearts.

They strongly felt his "Death in Battle", and this made them unable to directly fight. Trauma had struck them.

Of course, they did not concern the Church with this. If they could experience actual combat again, then it is likely they would be able to fight again. Everyday they urged themselves to return their past selves. However, Aiko-sensei protested what they were doing.

Aiko did not participate in the expedition. Her class was the rare and special "Farmer", during training, the church wanted her to get involved with the agricultural development. If it was Aiko-sensei, she would be able to solve their food issues.

She had fallen asleep in her bed after she got the news of Hajime's death. While she stayed in the safety of the city, her student had died. They would not be able to return to Japan with everyone. For Aiko-sensei who had such a strong sense of responsibility, it was shocking.

Therefore, she wasn't going to allow her students into the battlefield anymore. With her class, she would be able to change this world's whole food issue. That Aiko-sensei was protesting the training the students were getting with indomitable resolve. Not wanting to worsen their relationship, the church gave into her protests.

As a result, there were rogues who

trained themselves. The only one to continue their training was Jugo's party. Because they wanted to challenge "Orcus Dungeon" again. This time Meld and several member of the knights attended.

This was the 6th day of their journey into the dungeon. They were currently at the 60th level. Just 5 levels behind the highest recorded achievement. However, Kouki's group was stuck. No, rather than not being able to advance, they kept getting nightmares of what happened on that day.

Although it was a different cliff than the one that day, it still had a similar feel to it. They had to pass a suspension bridge that hung on the cliff to advance into the next level.

There was no problem per se, but they still remembered. In particular, Kaori, did not move while she started into the darkness of the abyss.

"Kaori..."

The worried call came from Shizuku. Kaori shook her head slowly as had her strong gaze at the view, and gave Shizuku a smile.

"I'm all right, Shizuku-chan."

"I see...Please don't overdo it. No need to be reserved with me."

"Ehehe, thanks. Shizuku-chan."

Shizuku gave a best friend a smile. Kaori's eyes gave off a strong glow. There were no despair or escapism

in those eyes. The insightful Shizuku that were sensitive to the subtleties of human, knew Kaori was telling the truth.

(For sure, Kaori is strong.)

Hajime's death was almost a certainty. It was lukewarm to saw he survived. However, it wasn't denial or escapism. Kaori was convincing herself to press forward, and Shizuku felt proud of her best friend.

However, the person with the hero-like quality couldn't read the mood. Kouki thought that Kaori was lamenting over Hajime's death as she stared into the bottom of the abyss. He concluded that the gentle Kaori was suffering from the death

of a classmate. His beliefs were filtering his thoughts, and he believed the smiling Kaori was forcing herself.

Kaori thought Hajime was special. Kouki had not even for a bit believed that there was a chance for survival. He tried to offer comforting words to Kaori.

"Kaori...I like your kindness. But you can't always be caught up in your classmate's death. You have to move forward. For sure, that is what Nagumo-kun would want."

"Wait, Kouki..."

"Be silent Shizuku! Even if I'm severe, don't try to stop me just because you're a childhood

friend....Kaori, its alright. I'm by your side. I won't die. I won't let anyone else die. I promise not to make Kaori sad anymore."

"Haaa...as usual so reckless...Kaori..."

"Haha, it's all right, Shizuku-chan....I understand what Kouki-kun is trying to say. Its fine."

"I see, you understand!"

Kaori couldn't help but smile wryly at Kouki's misunderstanding. Even if she told him what she truly felt, it wouldn't get through to him. Hajime had already died in Kouki's mind. He wouldn't be able to understand that the reason she was training so hard and taking this

expedition into the dungeon, was because she believed Hajime survived. Kouki's nature was to not doubt what he believed in. The boy would just take Kaori's feelings as denial of reality. They had known each other for a long time, so Kaori was familiar with how Kouki operated. That is why both of them remained quiet.

He thought those words were the only way to completely persuade her, he had no ulterior motive in those words. Kaori and Shizuku was used to his behavior, but other girls would have fallen for him with his sweet mask and atmosphere.

Normally, an Ikemen with such a good personality and skills would have his girl childhood friend

admire him. Shizuku had been in the adult dojo since she was small, because of her strict father, and with her insight she knew that Kouki's sense of justice could be a shortcoming. So, any more feelings than a childhood friend was not born in her. The other party was the same.

Shizuku had often told Kaori that was dense when it came to love, so Kouki's behavior had no effect on hier. He was a good person and an important childhood friend, but there were no romantic feelings.

"Kaori-chan, I'll cheer you on. If you need anything just ask me."

"That's right, Suzu is always Kaori's ally."

On the side they had heard Kouki's conversation. Taniguchi Suzu and Nakamura Eri had joined the conversation. After they entered high school, these two had become close friends with Kaori. They had joined the party lead by Kouki.

Nakamura Eri is a beautiful women with black hair that is styled into a natural bob, and wore glasses. She had a gentle character and usually she was the person that was in the back that watched everything quietly. Eri loved books. The girl gave off a feeling like she was in the typical book committee, and truthfully she was in the committee.

Taniguchi Suzu was a small girl at 142 cm tall. She was a bundle of

energy, that got people wondering where all that energy came from her small body. Suzu always was joyful and hopping around. With her heartwarming figure, she was the class mascot.

They understood what Kaori felt on that day Hajime disappeared, so they supported her decision.

"Yeah, Eri-chan, Suzu-chan, Thank you."

Kaori smiled at the two close friends she made in high school.

"Oh~...Kaorin is brave~, Nagumo-kun! To make Suzu and Kaori-chan this sad! If you aren't alive, Suzu will kill you!"

"S-Suzu? I don't think you can kill

him if he isn't alive."

"Don't worry about the details. If he is dead, we can just use Eririn's necromancy for Kaorin."

"S-Suzu, you have no delicacy. Kaori-chan believes Nagumo-kun is alive. Also, my necromancy..."

Suzu runs wild and Eri admonishes. That's their normal behavior. Kaori and Shizuku showed a joyful expression at the two's spectacle. Even though Kouki wasn't that far, he didn't hear the conversation. Naturally, Kouki was equipped with a hearing loss skill that always activates when there were important conversation or words.

"Eri-chan, I don't mind it."

"Suzu that's enough. Eri is troubled."

Suzu puffed her cheeks when Kaori and Shizuku laughed as they said those words. Eri was relieved when Kaori didn't take Suzu's words seriously. Her face blenched at the mention of "Necromancy".

"Eri-chan, necromancy is no good? Such a special class..."

"...Yeah, sorry. If I was able to use it properly, it would be such great help..."

"Eri, anyone have strong and weak points. You have such a high aptitude to magic, so don't worry about it."

"That's so, Eri-chan. Even if its your

class, there are preferences and fields of talent. Your precise and accurate magic is helpful for us."

"Yeah, I'll overcome if I try my best. I want to help everyone more."

Eri grasps her small hands into a fist to express her determination. Suzu hopped around saying: "That's the spirit, Eririn!" in this situation. Shizuku and Kaori smiled at their friend's perseverance.

Eri's class was "Necromancer". Dark magic is used that is associated with the spirits and consciousness. This kind of magic was able to cast bad status (debuffs) in battle. Necromancy is a super-high difficulty magic in Dark magic; it acted upon the residual thoughts of

the dead. There were a few priest in the Church that practiced it. The priest drew up the residual thoughts of the dead and conveyed them to their bereaved family.

However, that was not the true essence of this magic. The real power of this magic was the ability to give these residual thoughts of the dead a corpse to work with and controlling them like puppets. Although the revived dead will display deteriorated level of skill from their time alive. Also, there were ways to control or possess living humans too.

These puppets only respond to a certain extent. They also are very inanimate and pale, like a ghost. In addition, she felt ethically wrong in

using dead people like this. Eri choose not to delve into this part of the arts.

With the figure of those 4 girls, there was someone staring at Kaori from the rear with dark eyes. It was Hiyama Daisuke. When they came back to the kingdom and the students calmed down, there was severe blame waiting for Hiyama for what he did [Setting off Trap].

Hiyama had expected this and apologized with Dogeza. He knew that arguing or trying anything else wasn't going to help. The timing and place to apologize was important.

The perfect time came when he was able to apologize to Kouki in front

of everyone. He knew that if he apologized to Kouki, the guy would accept it and try to mediate with the class. His plan paid off, the criticism aimed at Hiyama was dissolved by Kouki. Kaori was originally kind, so she didn't particularly blame the apologizing Hiyama that was in tears. Just as he planned. However, Shizuku had noticed the underlying motive Hiyama had. She was disgusted with how he used her childhood friends.

Moreover, he was following the orders of the person. It was a terrible and horrifying order. Hiyama wanted to avoid it, but he had crossed the line. He couldn't stop now. However, Hiyama held a sense of delight and awe for the

person that drew up this terrible plan. While that person was so natural and blended with the class.

(That guy is crazy...but Kaori will be mine...)

Kaori could be obtained if he just listened to that guy. Hiyama smiled instinctively at those dark thoughts.

"Oi, Daisuke? What's wrong?"

Kondo, Nakamura, and Saito were sending dubious looks at Hiyama's state. These three was still together with Hiyama. Birds of a feather flock together for these 4. Hiyama was awkward for a moment, but soon his regained his friendly attitude. But if that friendship was true was a delicate matter.

"N-no, its nothing. I'm just happy that we got past 60 levels."

"Oh, for certain. Just 5 more and we will beat the record~"

"We are like, getting stronger too. That group that stayed behind has no guts."

"Well, don't say that. Because we are special."

These three did not seem to question Hiyama deception. People who kept fighting while thinking they were special and got arrogant were the villains of villains. They had a huge attitude compared to the group left behind at the Royal Palace. Complaints were thrown about in a haughty manner.

However, they did have the ability to break through the 60 levels, so they couldn't be stopped from their attitude.

Unlike them with their boisterous attitude, Kouki's side was quiet. Accessory seems to be the guiding principle.

Without much trouble, the group was at the highest attained level of 65.

"Brace yourself! The map of this area is incomplete. We won't know what will happen."

Meld's voice sounded. Kouki's group tightened their expression and stepped into the unknown domain.

A big hall appeared after they had advanced for a while. All the members had a bad feeling somehow. That feeling proved to be true. Magic appeared in the center of the room as soon as they entered it. A 10 m magic formation pulsed with dark red energy. That was a familiar sight for them.

"N-No way...is it that guy?"

Kouki cried out while a cold sweat dripped down his forehead. The other members also had a strained expression on them.

"Seriously, that guy didn't die?"

Ryutaro shouts while surprised. Meld responded to them with a calm voice and a stern expression.

"The origin of the demons in the dungeon is unknown. Even if you defeat it once, you will encounter it many times. Be careful! Do not forget to secure an escape route!"

So they can escape for sure if there was an emergency, Meld first priority was to issue commands to ensure an escape route. The subordinates obeyed immediately. But Kouki wanted to speak his mind.

"Meld. We are not the same as that time. I've become many times stronger. And won't be defeated again! Certainly we can win!"

"He, that's true. We won't always lose. This is a revenge match."

Ryutaro shouted out with a fearless smile. Meld just shrugged his shoulder like he couldn't help it. With their current abilities they should be okay. Similarly, he now had that same smile.

The magic formation finally lights up and explodes. Their nightmare had appeared before them.

"Guugaaa!!"

The beast gave a roar and stomped the ground. A glare full of fierce intent to kill was sent to Kouki's party by the Behemoth. In the group, there was a single girl that glared back at the monster; ignorant of the tension building up in the others.

The girl was Kaori. Unheard by anyone, Kaori with will declared to herself.

"I won't let you take anyone else. I will overcome you and go down to him."

Now, the fight to conquer their past began.

* * *

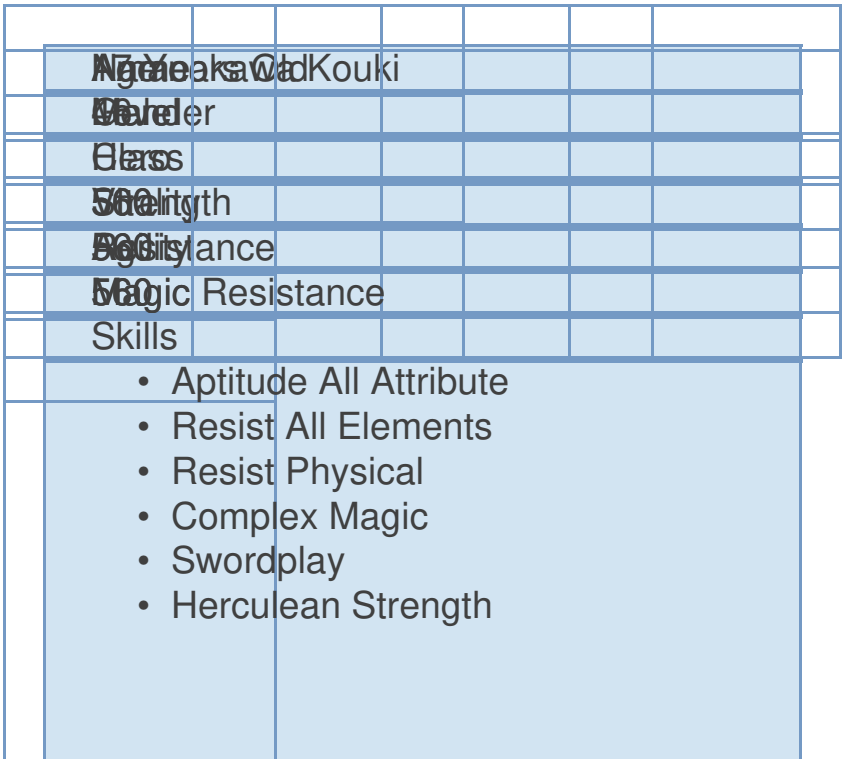
Translator's Note:

Author's note talks a little more about the dungeon. I'll translate it later if there is any interest, but for now I'll give a summary. He talks about how the comparison of strength in the dungeon. The behemoth is the strongest on the 65th floor but that's just the upper

level of the dungeon. Orcus went further than 100 levels that the people were aware of. Hajime had fallen in the abyss that was lower than those 100 levels. The monsters in the lower level (abyss) are much stronger than the upper levels (100 and up?).

He also showed as Kouki's stats

* * *



- Quick Movement
- Foresight
- High-speed Magic Recovery
- Sign Perception
- Magic Perception
- Limit Break
- Language Comprehension

Chapter 19: Beyond the Past - Part 2 (Classmate Side 2)

[Battojutsu: The art of the draw. Closely related to Iaido. This is the act of drawing the sword from the sheath and using that motion to accelerate the blade. Himura Kenshin from Kenshin is famous for this, so much that he is called the Battosai. If you want to see some examples of it then watch his fights.]

* * *

Kouki made the first move.

"Myriad of Soaring Wings, Reach the Heavens, "Soaring Flash""

The curved slash of light struck the Behemoth with a roar. Before he wasn't even able to injury the Behemoth with his strongest skill "Might of Heaven". However, he wanted to show that he wasn't the same as back then, and it was proven.

"Guurugaa!!"

A diagonal sword line ran appeared on the Behemoth's chest. It scraped the ground and screamed as its dark red blood dripped onto the ground.

"We can do it! We are certainly stronger! Nagayama left side,

Hiyama take the rear, Meld take the right side! Rear guard ready magic! High grade magic!"

Kouki gave out instructions rapidly. The results of Meld's officer training.

"Oh, he gave good instruction without hesitation. Did you hear? All hands, follow Kouki's command!"

Meld shouted and ran to wrap the right side of the Behemoth with his knights. Everyone started to move at that moment and encircle the Behemoth.

The vanguard quickly devised a line of defense that was desperate in preventing the raging Behemoth

from reaching the rear guard.

"Gurruuaa!"

With the roar the Behemoth stepped into the ground and pulverized it as it charged.

"Like I'll let you!"

"I won't allow it!"

Ryutaro and Jugo, the two biggest members of the class, quickly huddled the Behemoth and started to wrestle with it.

""The power to break the earth! "Herculean Strength"!""

Using their physical strength, strengthened by magic, they took the Behemoth's rush while they feet

slide on the ground.

"Gaaa!"

"Raaaa!"

"Oooooh!!"

Each of the three gave out a yell and strained their muscles. The smaller humans was not able to completely stop the Behemoth but it was enough to kill its momentum. It stomped on the ground in anger at that.

The other members did not miss the chance this brought.

"Supreme flash that cuts all, "Absolute Sever"!"

Shizuku's battojutsu hit the

Behemoth in the horn. Even with a sword artifact that added to the sharpness of the magic, it stopped midway and couldn't complete the sever.

"As hard as ever."

"Leave it to me! Grind, Crush, Blast, "Grand Hammer"!"

Meld jumped and flung his own sword at Shizuku's sword that was stuck in the middle. The sharp, heavy blow enhanced by magic helped strengthen Shizuku's sword and pushes it forward.

With that one of the Behemoth's horn is severed.

"Gaaaa!?"

The Behemoth goes on a wild rampage with all its might after the cut. This rampage blew the four people away.

"The gentle light that embraces all, "Halo"!"

An innumerable amount of nets made of light sprang forth and wrapped the four gently, after they had struck the floor and lost their breath. What Kaori used was a shape-shifting defensive light magic that killed the shock.

In a flash, Kaori started to chant a healing spell.

"Heaven's Blessing, heal universally, "Restore Heaven"!"

Even though all four did not

experience at the same time, they were all being healed. The spell was a ranged recovery spell that was at an intermediate level. It could heal multiple people at the same time. "Restore Heaven" was a higher rank version of the "Heaven's Blessing" she used before.

Kouki took a thrusting stance and rushed straight for the rioting Behemoth. He stabbed his sword into the previous wound as he finished an aria.

""Light Burst!""

The enormous magic stored in the Holy Sword flowed into the wound and caused an explosion.

"Gaaa!!"

A large quantity of blood gouged out of the wound. The Behemoth brandish its sharp claws at Kouki during the slight pause after he executed the skill.

"Kuuu!"

Kouki raised a groan and was blown away. The St. Armour he worse reflected the claws, but the impact still passed through and caused a coughing fit for him. The pains was just a moment. Kaori quickly followed up with a heal.

"Heaven's Blessing, restore his strength, "Restless Heaven"!"

This spell has lost the efficiency of healing multiple people, but it increased its power for single

targets. Kouki recovered instantly the light enveloped him.

The Behemoth was blown other members away when Kouki was knocked back. Without minding its injury it started to glow red hot.

"....Even if its horn is gone, it can use the spell. Here it comes!"

Shizuku's warning and the Behemoth leap came at the same time. Everyone had already experienced the Behemoth's Special Magic. However, the jump distance of this Behemoth was unexpected. The beast easily leap over the vanguard and advanced to the rear guard. It never jumped like that on the bridge and they didn't even dream it could jump that much.

Vanguard members showed an impatient expression.

One of the rear guard stop their chant and stepped forward. It was Taniguchi Suzu.

"Herein a Sanctuary, enemies of god shall not pass, "Absolute Virtue"!"

The dome of light appeared just as the Behemoth landed like a meteor. A terrible sonicboom and shockwave spread from the area and the surrounding floor broke into cobwebs.

However, the absolute defense Suzu made took the force of the Behemoths blow. But her version was the 2 verse version of the shield, not the 4 verse, so it didn't

have its original power.

The shield already had cracks in it. If Suzu's class wasn't "Barrier Master" it wouldn't have even formed. Suzu grit her teeth as she poured 2 verse worth of magic into a spell that usually didn't use that amount. She continued to picture the spell's image in her mind as she raised both hands desperately. The barrier that showed cracks disappeared. She believed her defense was absolute.

"Uuu! I won't lose!"

From the Behemoth, eyes full of murderous intent pierced the barrier and landed on Suzu. Her body was struck with fear and her hands shaked. She shouted

desperately to convey her limit. The Behemoth continued its attack and she wouldn't be able to hold for more than 10 seconds.

Its going to break! When Suzu thought that in her heart.

"Heaven's Blessing, a mystery here, "Yielding Heaven"!"

Suzu's body was wrapped in light, and with it the amount of magic poured into her spell increased. This was Kaori's spell to recover magic. Originally, it was a spell to restore others magic, moves according to the magic directed in its formula, inflow can be made to amplify to original amount. That how this spell works. Kaori could only use it because of her "Healer"

class.

"If its this! I love you Kaorin!"

Suzu poured the original 4 verse worth of magic into the shield and it was restored perfectly. All the cracks were repaired in an instant. Frustrated that it couldn't break through the barrier, it gave an angry scowl at the impertinent caster. She didn't budge at the stare and returned one instead.

Finally, the horn started to lose its red hot effect. The Behemoth loses its momentum and falls to the ground. Suzu's barrier ceased to exist at the same time.

Behemoth tried to aim at the breathing Suzu, but the vanguard

was already on top of it.

"Rear guard retreat!"

The back group fell back at Kouki's direction, and the advance guard enclosed upon the monster. A hit and evade strategy was used on the Behemoth, until the rear guard finished their chant.

"Step Back!"

Eri, the rear guard representative, signaled. Kouki and the others at that signal distanced themselves from the Behemoth.

After they retreated, an advanced fire based magic spell went off.

""""""Scorching Sun""""""

Five people performed this advanced spell. High-temperature flames gathered into a sphere, and burned the surrounding area like the sun. The "Scorching Sun" was made directly above the Behemoth and was 8 m in diameter; immediately after it swelled it was dropped onto the beast.

A tremendous amount of heat attacks the Behemoth. The magnitude of the power was too much that an ally might have gotten damaged. So, they quickly put up a barrier. "Scorching Sun" did not give any spare time for the Behemoth to escape, and soon its strong outer crust started to melt.

"Guuruagaaa!!"

The Behemoth's death throes filled the hall. A familiar scream from that day. Its cries were earsplitting, but soon it was exhausted like it was burnt away by the flames.

In the center of the blacken area, all that remained of the beast were ruins.

"D-Did we win?"

"I think we won..."

"We won..."

"Seriously?"

"Serious?"

Everyone was looking stunned at the area the Behemoth was. Bit by bit mutters of victory spread

throughout. Kouki was stunned, and when he regained himself; he hoisted his Holy Sword above his head and straightened his back.

"That's right! It's our victory!"

The sword seemed to respond to his feelings as it started to sparkle. At his victory cry, the others came to the same realization and cheers arose. Guys were patting each other shoulders, while the girls hugged each other. Meld and the knights were impressed.

Shizuku called out to Kaori, who was still staring at the place the Behemoth occupied.

"Kaori? What's the matter?"

"Eh, Ahh, Shizuku-chan....Yeah, it's

nothing. I was just thinking how far we came."

Kaori answered Shizuku with a wry smile. She was immersed in her emotions after defeating her previous nightmare and confirming she was stronger now.

"That's right. We did get stronger."

"Yeah...Shizuku-chan. Further ahead is Nagumo-kun..."

"You are going to check, right? It was for that reason you tried your best."

"Ehehe, that's right."

To move forward. To ascertain Hajime's state, because of possible specifics. Scared that there would

be no answer, she became faint-hearted. Shizuku sympathized, and held Kaori's hand.

Kaori showed a smile at her forceful grip.

Kouki started to gather around the two.

"Are you two safe? Kaori, your heals were the best. If you are here, I fear nothing!"

A refreshing smile dawned on his face as he thanked the two.

"Eh, I'm fine. Are you fine too, Kouki?"

"Yeah, no problems. Kouki-kun, I was glad to have been helpful to everyone."

The two also gave a smile in return. However, Kouki's words casted a small shadow over their hearts.

"With this, Nagumo-kun can rest in peace. Because the classmates he defended was able to defeat the beast that killed him."

""..""

Kouki did not notice the expression Kaori and Shizuku had, as he was immersed with his emotions. In Kouki's mind, the only reason Hajime fell into the abyss was the Behemoth. There was no mistake. The direct cause of the bridge collapsing was the shock from the Behemoth's attacks. However, the magic that hit Hajime was the real reason.

Right now there was an unspoken agreement to not talk about what happened, but the fact does not change. Kouki seemed to just forget or was unaware about this fact, and thought that defeating the Behemoth would allow Hajime to rest in peace. For he unconditionally believed in the good will of people. Those that were negligent would not be blamed forever. Besides, he would never dream that someone had done it intentionally.

However, even if she didn't mind it, she won't forget about it. Since she did not know "who", she just tolerated. She would certainly torture severely(*) if she knew. That is why she is shocked at how Kouki forgot that fact.

Shizuku dropped a sigh. She wanted to complain reflexively, but Kouki did not mean anything bad with it. Rather, his speech was his best at thinking about Hajime and Kaori. In a sense, that is why standing up to him would be bad. In addition, the classmates were celebrating. Shizuku was woman who could read the atmosphere, so talking about this out loud was not the time.

An energetic girl flew in this delicate atmosphere.

"Kaorin!"

Suzu embraced Kaori after calling her out with such a weird way.

"Fuwa!?"

"Ehehe, Kaorin, I super love you. If Kaorin didn't support me, I would have been flattened."

"M-Mou, Suzu-chan. Where are you touching!"

"Gehehe, is this place okay? I guess this place is no good?"(*)

She was embarrassed by what Suzu was saying, Suzu got carried away and started to fondle Kaori's body like an old pervert. In response, Shizuku gave a chop. An intense tsukkomi smashed into Suzu's head.

"Stop it. Who is Suzu's?...Kaori is mine."

"Shizuku-chan!?"

"Fu, I won't allow it~. Only Suzu will get to do those things with Kaorin."

"S-Suzu-chan!? What are you thinking of!?"

Kaori was stuck between Shizuku and Suzu, so she quickly did a tsukkomi. The delicate atmosphere was gone.

From this point on, they would be entering unexplored territory. They had shaken off their past and advanced.

Chapter 20: A Partner's Abilities

"Da-a, damn!"

"...Hajime, Fight..."

"You're too carefree!"

Currently, they were traversing through savage grass with Yue on his shoulder. These grass grew up to 160 cm and goes up to his shoulders. If Yue was to walk in this, her figure would disappear. Then came the reason for their escaping through this grass.

""""""""""""Shaa!!""""""""""""

There were nearly 200 demons chasing them.

After Hajime had finished resupplying, they had advanced 10 levels. Hajime's equipment and skills were useful in their journey, and Yue's magic was also a big factor in their progress.

Yue could use any magic and Hajime supported her with his skills. Her barrier and recovery magic was not that great. Since she had "Auto Regen", she may have thought it was unnecessary. There was no problem because Hajime had his "potion".

That is how they advanced to this present level. The floor had an appearance of a forest, an extensive

forest. Lush and dense trees over 10 m tall lined the forest, and the atmosphere was damp. Good thing it was not hot like the tropical forest level he encountered.

When Hajime and Yue were searching for the stairs to the lower floor, a rumbling of the ground occurred. A demon the reminded Hajime of a huge reptile appeared in front of them. It like a tyrannosaurus rex, but there was a flower on its head. Sharps tusk thirsting for blood surged from the powerful beast, and the sunflower-like flower fluttered on top. It was a surreal experience.

Tyrannosaurus rex gave out a roar and rushed at them.

Hajime calmly took out Donner...before that Yue raised her hand.

""Scarlet Spear""

A flame appeared at Yue's hand that spiralled into a spear form. The spear shot pierced through the T-Rex mouth and penetrated out the back. Its life ended as the surroundings melted. A rumble sounded as the T-Rex fell sideways onto the ground, and the flower on its head plopped onto the ground.

"..."

Hajime stayed silent for a bit. Yue seemed to be incomparably intense these days. In the beginning, she would devote herself to covering

Hajime. On their journey she started to instantly kill any monsters that opposed Hajime. He started to feel depressed at being useless. Is it because he dragged his feet and it was over before he could do anything? His mind was seized with anxiety. If such a thing was true, he was going to have a blow to his confidence.

He address Yue with a forced smile as he kept Donner in his hands.

"Ah, Yue? It is good to be enthusiastic...Recently, I felt like, I haven't done much..."

Yue turned to look at Hajime, and Hajime could see a slight proud look in her expressionless face.

"....I want to be useful....because I'm your partner...."

Seems, she wasn't content with just covering Hajime. He did think that since they were going to travel together from now on, as partner they should rely on each other. At that time, Yue collapsed after using up all her magic. Hajime had said it to comfort her after she released...it seems to have remained deep in her mind. She wanted to show her worth as his partner.

"Haha, no. You already helped me so much. Yue's magic is very powerful, so please take the rear; close combat isn't your strong suit. The frontlines is for me."

"...Hajime...okay..."

Yue fell silent at Hajime's advice. He smiled at Yue, who was trying too much to be helpful to Hajime. To show he didn't dislike her, he stroke her soft hair. Yue's expression returned to her usual mood. Hajime couldn't say anything.

Because he didn't want to become dependent, he had to be cautious...While he thought that, he inadvertently spoiled himself. Hajime was amazed at that.

In a sense, these two were flirting, but Hajime caught a demon signature on his "Perception". Approximately 10 of them were coming towards them. From the movements of the leader, it seemed to be a two-tailed wolf? He wanted

to check it out, and urged Yue to move. Hajime wanted to move into an advantageous place because of their numbers.

When the beasts were trying to encircle him, Hajime rushed at one of them. Before he could finish a 2 m reptile dropped from the overgrowth in the trees. The reptile's appearance was similar to a raptor. There was a tulip blooming on its head.

"...Cute..."

"...Is it fashion?"

Yue muttered unintentionally as she felt unwinded. Hajime turned his eyes towards the demon and murmured an impossible guess.

The raptor and T-rex both had these unknown flowers! It seems to scatter bloodlust as it growls. War preparation. The flower sways and flutters...

"Shaaa!!"

Looking at Hajime who was occupied with its flower, the Raptor pounced. There were 20 cm talons attached to its tough legs. A heinous light glint off of those talons. Hajime and Yue stepped back, but parted left and right. Hajime went overhead the raptor with his "Air Walk". He then shot at the tulip to test it.

All parts of the flower scattered with the sound of gunfire. The raptor seemed to twitch for a

moment, it rolled as it failed its landing. It somersaulted into a tree and stopped moving. Silence filled the scene. Yue comes near Hajime as she looks at the raptor and the scattered tulip.

"...Dead?"

"No, it seems alive..."

Just as Hajime said, the body started to twitch. The raptor got up and looked around. It saw its

fallen tulip on the ground and stomped it. Not giving a care to its enemies.

"Eh, that reaction, What does it mean?"

"...Prank."

"....No, its not a schoolchild that put a paper on its back."

When it was satisfied, it looked to the heavens like it was saying: "Phew, Good job!" A cry was raised. The raptor faced Hajime and was startled.

"Did you notice it? It was in a trance."

"...Bullying afterall."

Hajime tsukkomi'd, and Yue looked at it with sympathy. The raptor stiffened for a while. Eventually it took a low posture, fangs exposed and leapt. Hajime shot Donner at the raptor's open mouth.

The bullet pierced through the raptor mouth then exited out of its

back head, and disappeared into the forest behind.

With the momentum of its jump, the raptor slide on the ground. Hajime and Yue looked at the corpse of the raptor without saying anything.

"Really, what on earth?"

"...It was bullied. To be beaten...pity."

"No, it wasn't bullying, definitely wasn't."

Hajime stopped trying to figure it out because he did not understand how the demons think. They started to move to an advantageous place because the encircling monsters were getting closer.

Countless thick 5m in diameter trees stretched on and on in the new area they were in. Neighboring trees' branches were intertwined with each other. Hajime used his "Air Walk" and Yue used wind magic to jump overhead the branches. LIke an air corridor. Hajime was going to exterminate the demons by sniping at them from overhead.

Less than 5 minutes later, raptors began to appear under them. Hajime intended to throw an incendiary grenade, however, he froze. Yue had also hardened with her hand ready to unleash her magic. Because...

"Why do all these guys have flowers?"

"Flower garden..."

There were more than 10 raptors and all of them had flowers on their heads. A variety of flowers too.

Hajime's unintentionally Tsukkomi had attracted the attention of all the raptors. The raptors then took stances to leap into attack. Hajime's strategy was to stay out of their range then snipe them with Donner and drops a incendiary grenade to start off. Shots are fired in succession, a white flash precedes each death, one by one raptors die with their heads blown off. Yue was using her "Scarlet Spear" to kill the surrounding raptors.

Three seconds later, the incendiary grenade explodes in the middle of

the raptor group. Tar blazing at 3000 degree centigrade splattered onto the raptors. Hajime heaves a sigh of relief after he saw that his weapons worked on the monsters of this level. Seems like that scorpion was special.

Less than 10 seconds later, all the enemies had been cleared. However, Hajime had a dull look. Yue noticed this and tilted her head as she walked towards him.

"...Hajime?"

"...Yue, Isn't it weird?"

"?"

"They were too weak."

Yue took noticed after his words.

That was true, the T-rex and raptor was easily exterminated because they made such easy movements and normal attacks. Their unnatural movement was almost mechanical and even their blood lust. After watching the scene where the raptor trampled the flower in anger, he felt that the flowers were not suppose to be on them.

The moment when Hajime was going to tell Yue to advance carefully, his "Perception" caught more approaching demons. A vast amount of demons were gathering from all directions. His "Perception" range was at a 20 m radius, and all the demons he sensed was coming straight for them.

"Yue, this is bad. I'm picking up 30, no, 40 or more monsters coming our way. Someone seems to be ordering them to surround us in all directions."

"...Do we run?"

"...No, we can't with this many. Better to exterminate them from on top of the tallest tree."

"Hn....let's go oversized."

"Oh, I'll bite."

Moving at high speed, they quickly went to find the highest tree in the area. They destroyed the branches that could help the demons climbed upwards.

Hajime waits calmly while holding

Donner. Yue understood and gently grabbed the hem of his clothes. His hand was occupied so he used his body as substitute a hold. Her grip became a little stronger.

Then the first batch arrived. Not just raptors, but also T-rexes. The T-rexes were ramming the tree, and the raptors were using their talons to climb the tree.

Hajime pulled the trigger on Donner. He shot towards the earth to hit the climbing raptors. When Donner's chambers were exhausted, Hajime exposed the cylinder. With a rotation he uses the ejector rod to clear the chambers and loads the gun positioned within his left armpit. During this 5 seconds. The incendiary grenade he dropped

before the shooting, explodes onto the monsters. Flames scatter the area. Donner blazes again after it was reloaded. 15 of the monsters already fell, but that was not enough.

Soon, an additional 30 raptors and 4 T-rexes have gathered under their eyes. They were attempting to smash the tree Hajime was on, or climb up to attack him.

"Hajime?"

"Not yet...A little more."

Hajime answered Yue, while he was shooting down at the raptors. She continued to concentrate on her magic barrage, as she believed in him.

Finally, more than 50 monsters gathered below them. This was just a guess because it was hard to distinguish now. He sent a signal to Yue to say that the monsters he sensed with "Perception" were accounted for.

"Yue!"

"Okay! "Freezing Hell"!"

When Yue triggered her magic, underneath them an area was frozen and it was spreading. The area was being covered in blue ice. When the ice touched the demons, the ice covered them like a coffin. There was not even a moment to resist. Monsters lost the light in their eyes after they were encased in ice. An area of 50 m square was

frozen from the spell. It was worthy of being call "Extermination Magic".

"Haa...Haa.."

"Good job. Indeed a "Vampire Princess"."

"...Kufufu..."

Hajime gives Yue praise at the spectacle before them. Just like the spell's name, it truly looked like a frozen hell in the surrounding area. Yue ran out of magic after using that superlative magic. She gasped for breath. Probably, she is having a case of fatigue.

He sat down beside her and placed a hand on her hips to support her, and presented his nape. To allow her to recover by drinking his

blood. Although she does recover from the "potion", but it takes a long time for a vampire to recover with it. Blood seemed the best.

Yue was embarrassed, inspite of her deadpan look, at Hajime's praise and just laughed. She blushed as she placed her mouth against his neck.

But Hajime stands up with a grim expression. He was sensing more than 100 demons.

"Yue, there are several times more."

"!?"

"If it is this many, there is something going on. We just eliminated them all right now. Yet, another suicide attack...like they

were compelled to...that flower...maybe."

"...Parasite."

"Yue thinks so too?"

She nodded to affirm his guess.

"...There should be a main body."

"Seems, that as long as those flowers are on them, they are puppets. We are up against all the monsters on this floor."

Before Hajime is crushed by the amount, he should look for the main body. Looking for the lower floor would be hard if they didn't take care of them. Though they could find it along the way.

There wasn't time to let Yue suck his blood, so he tried to pass her the sacred water. however, Yue refused it. She stretched both her hands out towards the confused Hajime and says...

"Hajime...Carry..."

"How old are you? Are you trying to suck my blood while we move?"

Hajime was correct. Yue nodded her head to answer him. Magical power recovery was slow for Yue with the sacred water, and they should keep a contingency plan for recovery. When he is desperately busying himself, he eventually feels a few resistance. But, necessity knows no laws.

He consented to carrying her...Because it would get in the way. He gave her a piggyback ride, as he started his search for the main body.

And this is how we end up with the current situation.

They were being chased by close to 200 demons. The thicket was troublesome. Yue had already finished her meal but she didn't get off his back.

From the demons behind.

Dododododododododododo

Monsters approach them while making that noise. Raptors travels side by side while hiding in the tall grass, and pouncing from all

directions. Hajime ran towards the place he considered most suspicious, while he counterattacked. Yue did not allow the siege to overwhelm them by using her magic.

Kapu, Chu

The two glared at the exit of the forest ahead. On the other side was the wall of the labyrinth. It looked like a cave with crack spreading from the center. Why, was this place the objective? The attacking demons had a constant habit in their movements. Hajime countered while they advanced. Their movements become violent when they attempted to escape in a certain direction. As if, they were trying to lead them away from

there. They decided to rush in that direction because the demons were increasing in number and they couldn't stay in this situation.

Apparently, hiding in the grass had already made it fail. Hajime jumps ahead with "Air Walk" and "Flicker".

Kapu, Chu [sound of blood sucking]

"Yue-san!? Can you stop the blood sucking that has been going on?"

"...Inevitable."

"Lies! You aren't exhausted anymore."

"...Those guys' flower...I'm also...Ku."

"What are you groaning

unnaturally? Don't try to shift the blame, Baka! I can't afford it, hey!"

Inspite of the situation, Yue was obsessed with Hajime's blood. It was not odd that a former royalty couldn't control their guts. Although he was playing, he properly countered. Hajime jumped into the cracks, as he took along 200 monsters.

The cave's cracks were narrow for two average adults standing side by side. Of course, the T-rex couldn't fit through it, and the raptors could only enter one by one. One of the raptors that entered teared to tear Hajime with its extended claws. Before it could attack, Hajime shot it with Donner. He used his transmutation to block the crack.

"Phew, We'll be okay for a bit with this."

"...Good job."

"If you feel so, get down."

"...Mu...no choice."

Yue reluctantly descends with Hajime's words. His back seemed to be very comfortable.

"So then, those guys were very desperate. Is this place, bingo? Do not relax your guard."

"Okay."

Since the entrance was closed with transmutation, the two continued deeper into the cave.

They arrived into a big hall after traveling for a while. Cracks were even continuing into the depths of the halls. Perhaps it was the stairs to the lower level. Hajime feels the area. He did not sense anything but he kept his guard up because of an unpleasant feeling. There were a lot of demons in this dungeon that could hide from his senses.

When they arrived at the center of the room, then it happened. From all direction, an innumerable amount of green ping pong balls few in. Yue and Hajime was instantly back to back, and intercepting the flying balls. Hajime decided to create a stone wall because of the number that exceeded 100. The wall was strong enough to prevent the balls from

piercing it. Seems like the balls didn't have that much power. Yue was able to intercept the balls with her wind magic, with its excellent speed, without a problem.

"Yue, it's probably an attack from the main body. Do you know where it is?"

"..."

"Yue?"

Hajime asked her if she knew of its location. Yue did not have a searching skill like "perception", but as a vampire she had sharper senses than Hajime. However, she didn't answer his question. Suspicious, Hajime called out to her, but his answer...

"...Run...Hajime!"

Before anyone knew it, her hand faced Hajime. Wind converged onto her hand. Instinct warned violently, and Hajime jumped aside with full power. A blade of strong wind passes the place where Hajime used to be and bisects the cliff in the back.

"Yue!?"

Hajime wanted to raise his voice at the surprise attack, but he understood when he saw what was on her head. There was a blooming flower on Yue's head. Did it match Yue? It was a crimson rose that matched her well.

"Shit, was it those green balls!?"

He wanted to beat himself for his carelessness. Hajime continued to avoid the wind attacks from Yue.

"Hajime...Uhh...."

Yue broke her deadpan expression for a sorrowful one. When he shot the raptor's flower, it stomped on the flower. That would mean that the victim's consciousness is still there while being manipulated. Only deprived the body of its freedom.

But then he already knew of how to free her. Hajime tried to draw the trigger as he aimed at the flower. However, the controller knew of Hajime's firearm that shot down the previous flower. Yue's body moved to cover the flower. She was

moving around alot that there was a chance the shot would blow her face away. Hajime closed in to cut it, but Yue hit her own head.

"...You got some nerves..."

It was warning Hajime to stay away, Yue would be the target of the magic if he didn't. Yue surely was almost immortal. However, he couldn't deny that she might have a spell that could disintegrate her and prevent her regen. Yue would be able to fire it at an instant too. He wanted to avoid the gamble of a suicide attack.

The monster appeared from the dark cracks as it understood Hajime's hesitation.

A demon that was the mix of a woman and a plant came out. It was similar to a dryad or aruraune in RPGs. The demon appeared before Hajime. There is a legend that dryads brings good luck, if not hostile, and they were beautiful woman. But the one in front of him did not give that impression. Indeed, it looked like a human woman, but it had an ugly face like its inner ugliness was overflowing. It also had countless vines waving around, and it felt creepy. "Her" mouth was laughing and grinning at something.

Hajime pointed his gun at it at once. However, Yue entered his line of fire.

"Hajime...Sorry..."

Yue grits her teeth with a mortified expression. Being unable to control herself was probably intolerable. She should still be resisting it desperately. Blood dripped from her lips as she moved her mouth to apologizes. Her sharp fangs were probably the cause. Was she frustrated with herself, or the curse, or both?

The aruraune fires a green ball into Hajime while using Yue as a shield. Hajime brushes it off with Donner. It was destroyed, though not visible, and probably scattered spores around. There was no sign of a flower blooming on Hajime. Laughter stopped coming from the demon and it looked confused. Spores did not seem to work on Hajime.

(Most likely, it is because of all my resistances.)

Just as Hajime guessed, the spores were a kind of neurotoxin. His "Poison Resist" allowed him to resist it. It was sheer luck for Hajime, Yue can't be blamed for anything. She shouldn't feel heartbreak.

Realizing that the spores were useless against Hajime, the demon grumply ordered Yue to cast her spell. Again a blade of wind was formed. Hajime thought it wasn't able to demonstrate the full capability of the victims. The raptors movements were evidence of this.

(That's a blessing in disguise)

If he tried to avoid the blade of wind, the aruraune would just threaten to hurt Yue. He used "Vajra", obtained from cyclops, to endure the blades. This skill solidify and expands magic to cover the whole body. A very reliable skill that demonstrates defensive power equivalent to its name. Because he was still inexperienced with it, Hajime could only display 1/10 of its original power. The blades had no power even if it was sharp, so he was able to endure it.

(There is a method to settle this immediately once....afterwards would be scary...or throw an incendiary grenade?)

As Hajime was pondering the situation, Yue raised a sorrowful

cry.

"Hajime!...I'll be fine...just shoot!"

Yue had prepared herself for this. If she couldn't control herself then she would rather have Hajime shoot her. She put that kind of will into her eyes that watched Hajime.

There was no way he could do that. For sure he would save her. Such a hot line would usually jump out at this scene, to bond with the heroine. The previous Hajime would do it. But the current Hajime would disappoint such expectations.

"Eh, is that okay? That'll save me."

Bang!

Gunfire echoes in the hall. When he heard Yue's words, he pulled the trigger without hesitation. The hall was filled with a cold air and silence. Rose petals were dancing in the air and fell onto the ground.

Yue was blinking her eyes with surprise. Aruraune was linking its eyes with surprise. To confirm it was gone, Yue placed both her hands on her head. There was blond hair that had frizzled or were torn off. Aruraune also understood the situation. It stared at Hajime with accusing eyes.

"No, don't make such eyes."

Bang!

He discharged his gun with his

Tsukkomi. The aruraune's head exploded into green liquids. It fell down to the ground while convulsing.

"So, Yue, are you fine? No discomfort?"

Hajime confirms Yue's safety with a laid-back feeling. However, Yue is glaring at Hajime while stroking her head.

"...You shot."

"Ah? Well you did say shoot."

"...You didn't hesitate..."

"That, I finally decided to shoot. I had confidence in my aim. As expected, Yue was to stomach it without any question. From now on

I'll put that into consideration."

"...My scalp was shaved a little...maybe..."

"Well, if its that much you'll regen it? No problem."

"Uhh~..."

Yue started to hit Hajime's stomach repeatedly with a face that said "That is certainly true, but..." Indeed, she told him to shoot, and she had prepared herself. But Yue is a woman. She had seen some dreams. He should have at least hesitated a little. At such a light response, she wanted to complain.

Hajime did not worry for Yue after he found out that a manipulated Yue wouldn't be able to use high-

level magic. There were few spells that could overcome her immortality. It was unpleasant to shoot without hesitation. Even if it was the biggest taboo to hesitate in combat. He tilted his head in wonder at what she was dissatisfied with. She was losing to such a Hajime, and just turned away from him with a pout.

Hajime sighed inwardly, how was he going to fix the mood. This would be harder than beating the Aruraune.

Chapter 21: The Guardian of the Depths

There was no question that the Aruraune was dead, Yue was still hurt. After that event, she sucked Hajime's blood until he fainted. That was successful enough to put her back into a good mood, so they continued their journey.

Their journey continued until they had descended 100 levels from where Hajime first started. Before each level he would check his equipment and supplies. As always, whenever Hajime worked Yue would stare at him working. She

was really watching Hajime rather than the work. Even now she was watching him work from his right side while relaxing. Her expression did not suit the atmosphere of the dungeon.

They did not know how many days have passed since they met, because there was no sense of time underground. Recently, Yue was displaying a more comfortable expression. She was even acting a little spoiled.

Whenever they were resting at base, she would especially get glued to him. If he laid down, she would cling on his arm while they slept near each other. Yue would embrace him from the back when he sat down. When she fed on his

blood, she would cuddle him from the front. She would stay there even after she was done feeding. With a content expression, she would rub her face on his chest.

Hajime is a man. Yue with her 12 years old appearance was charming and should not easily invoke lust, but she was older than that. For the one being bewitched from that glimpse, it was troublesome. Still they were in the dungeon, the tension in the helped him bear with it. When they returned to the surface, he didn't have much confidence in resisting her advances with her adult mode. There may not be the meaning to impart...

"Hajime...as careful as usual..."

"Hmm? Ah, because its the 100th floor next. I thought there might be something there. The upper dungeon is believed to have 100 floors....just in case."

When Hajime passed the 80th floor of this place, he thought there was a possibility that the place they were in was no longer the usual "Orcus Dungeon". He had the same feeling as when he fell into the abyss. Judging from what he sensed as he traversed this level, this was certainly a basement a way off from the usual labyrinth.

Firearms, martial arts, special magic, weapons, and transmutation. After polishing these skills, Hajime had confidence in himself. He wouldn't be taken down easily.

However, this place was scary enough to kill him even with his abilities.

That is why he prepared as much as possible. Hajime's current status...

Age	17 Years Old
Gender	Male
Class	Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Strength	2000
Vitality	2000
Dexterity	2000
Agility	2000
Intelligence	2000
Magic Resistance	1780

Skills

- Transmutation
  - Mineral Appraisal
  - Precision Transmutation
  - Mineral Enquiry
  - Mineral Separation
  - Mineral Fusion
  - Replica Transmutation
- Magic Manipulation
  - Magic Emission
  - Magic Compression
  - Remote Control

- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
    - Air Walk
    - Flicker
    - Grand Legs
- Air Claws
- Night Vision
- Far Vision
- Perception
- Magic Perception
- Heat Perception
- Hide Presence
- Poison Resist
- Paralysis Resist
- Petrification Resistance
- Varja
- Magic Penetration
- Coercion
- Telepathic Communication
- Language Comprehension

His status has continuously climbed after his first demon, though he had not received much Special Magic. The stats did not increase anymore from normal monsters, but the boss

or high-level monsters still did. Just like the other demons that didn't get Special magic from eating other demons, and his stats were getting harder to raise in his state.

When Hajime and Yue finished all their preparations, they went to the stair that led them down.

The level they stumbled upon, was a very large space supported by a vast number of pillars. Each of the pillars where 5m in diameter, and each had spirals designs and vine patterns engraved onto them. Arrangement of each row of pillars was very uniform and had them spaced out evenly. There was about 30 m to the ceiling. Unlike the usual rough ground in the dungeon, this place had beautiful flat ground.

The room gave off a solemn atmosphere.

They stepped into the room while they admired it. All the pillars started to shine faintly then. This got them to regain their caution. Pillars lit up sequentially towards the back of the room.

Hajime was vigilant for a while, but they decided to advance because nothing happened. They advanced while making full use of their senses and perception skills. After they progressed 200 m, they found a dead end ahead. No, not a dead end, but a huge door. A double door 10 m tall that had beautiful sculptures engraved onto it. Particularly, some of the patterns drawn on top of the octagon system

"...This looks amazing. By any chance..."

"Abode of Traitors?"

He had a feeling this was the room with the last boss. Hajime's instincts were sending him warnings, while there was no reaction from his perception skills. It was going to be bad ahead. Yue seemed to feel it too because there was sweat on her forehead.

"Isn't this the great? We finally reached our goal."

Hajime disregards his instinct and puts his bold smile on. He had no choice but to keep going, no matter what was behind there.

"...Hn!"

Yue stares at the door with an expression that told him she was prepared for it.

The two finally walked past the last pillars and advanced towards the door.

At that moment, a huge magic formation about 30 meters wide appeared between them and the door. Crimson light emitted from the magic, and it pulsated.

Hajime recognized this magic. He couldn't forget it, it was the magic that triggered because of the trap that day and caused him to fall into the abyss. But the magic formation for the Behemoth was just 10 m in diameter. The magic formation in front of them was 3 times larger

than that, and it was a lot more complex and detailed.

"Hey hey, what's with this size? Is it really the last boss?"

"...It's fine...We won't lose..."

As expected, Hajime smiled. Yue caught one of his arm tightly with a determined expression on her face.

Hajime nodded at Yue's words, and glared at the magic formation. Seems like they wouldn't be able to advance if they didn't defeat the monster that came out of that magic formation.

The formation shined more and more till it finally burst. Hajime and Yue held up their arms to prevent the light from blinding them. When

the light disappeared, it was there...

A monster 30 m in length, 6 heads with long necks, sharp fangs, and dark red eyes. Comparably to the Hydra of the myths.

"""""""Kuruuaan!"""""""

Those six pair of eyes stared at Hajime as it gave off a strange roar. It seemed to want to bring judgement upon the intruders who didn't know their place. A fierce thirst for blood, that would have stopped an ordinary man's heart, was flung at Hajime.

One of the heads with a red crest on it opened its mouth as flames emitted from it. The flames were already on the scale of a huge wall.

Hajime and Yue jumped to the right and left to start their counterattack. Hajime fires Donner at the red head. The bullet blew off the red head.

When Hajime pumped his fist in the air at his victory, one head with a white pattern shouted. White light wrapped around the red head and restored it fully, like time had been reversed. The white head seems to be able to use healing magic.

Yue had launched an ice shard at a green head and blew it away. However, the result was the same as the red one when the white head casted its spell.

Hajime started to speak with Yue

through the "Telepathic Communication", while he tsked.

("Yue! Aim for that white head! Or it's endless!"

("Okay!")

The head with a blue pattern shot out a gravel of ice from its mouth. Hajime and Yue were aiming for the white head while they avoided the shot.

Bang!

""Scarlet Spear"!"

A flash of light and a blazing spear shot towards the white head. However, the moment when it was about to hit, the yellow head quickly went into the line of fire and

bloated. The head shined yellow and took both of the attacks head on. After the attack settled, there was a flawless yellow head glaring at them.

"Tsk! A shield. That head shields the healing head, a nice balance."

Hajime threw an incendiary grenade over the heads. At the same time, he fired Donner at the White Head with full power. Yue helped by firing off her "Scarlet Spear" in rapid succession. Her "Azure Sky" may have surpassed the yellow head and hit the white head, but she would be easy prey after using such a strong spell that would exhaust her. She may be able to recover fast if she drank blood, but the heads were probably not going

to allow the chance. Unless the number of heads could be halved, she couldn't use her best spells.

The yellow head was taking all their attacks. But soon it was showing signs of damage in its previously flawless head.

"Kuruan!"

Its white head heals the yellow head at once. The head performed its healer role perfectly. However, at that moment the incendiary grenade exploded over the white head. Tar at 3000 degree centigrade was scattered around. When it poured onto the white head, it screamed in pain.

Don't miss this chance! Hajime sent

this message telepathically. They planned for a simultaneous attack. Before they could execute, a scream sounded. Yue's scream.

"Noooo!!"

"!? Yue!"

He quickly tried to rush over to her, but was intercepted by wind blades and fireballs fired by the green head and red head respectively. Yue was still screaming, Hajime wondered what was going on with his teeth clenched. The black head, he realized it had done nothing this whole time.

(No that's wrong, it had already done something.)

Hajime fired Donner at the black

head, while he dodged around with "Flicker" and "Air Walk". With the sound of firearm, the black head that was staring at Yue was blown away. Yue collapsed at the same time. He could see that her face was pale even from a distance. The blue head opened its big mouth and stretched its head towards Yue to swallow her.

"Like I'll let you!!"

Hajime prepared himself to get damaged in the storm of wind blades and fireballs as he used his "Flicker". A potentially fatal attack was avoided with the use of Donner and "Air Claws". At the last moment, Hajime arrived between the blue head and Yue. But there was no time to counter, so he

quickly triggered "Vajra". Hajime could not use this skill while moving. That is why he stood before Yue to block that attack. The magic covered his body at the same time the head bit him.

"Kururu!"

"Guu!"

While raising a low growl, the blue head swallowed Hajime whole. When it tried to close its jaws, Hajime leaned forward and braced his legs to prevent it from closing. He pushed Donner against the head's upper jaw and pulled the trigger.

The blue head erupted from the blast and bits of its brain flew off.

Hajime used his "Grand Kick" on the motionless head. Then he threw a flash grenade and sonic grenade at the Hydra.

"Sonic Grenade" was developed from a demon that could emit ultrasonic waves that they met on the 80th level. The demon had a special organ inside its body that generated these sounds to attack. Hajime did not get any special magic for defeating this monster, but he was able to use its special organ as materials for his new grenade.

Those two grenades covered the Hydra in intense light and ultrasonic waves. Hajime carried Yue and hid behind the pillars with the chance those grenades

provided.

"Hey! Yue! Get it together!"

"..."

She didn't react to his words with her paling expression and trembling body. What the heck did the black head do to her? While he cursed, he slapped Yue's cheeks. Hajime called out for her telepathically and gave her some sacred water. After a while, light began to dwell in her hollow eyes.

"Yue!"

"...Hajime"

"Yeah, its me. Are you alright? What happened?"

Yue confirmed Hajime's existence with blinking eyes. She extends out her small hands and touched his face. A relieved sigh escaped her lips as she realized that Hajime was really in front of her, and tears began to collect at the edge of her eyes.

"...What a relief...I thought I was abandoned...alone in the dark again..."

"Ah? What are you talking about?"

Hajime was perplexed at her state. Yue said she saw a scene play out where Hajime had abandoned her and resealed her. When she saw that, a strong sense of insecurity struck her. She became bound by fear then it paralyzed her body and

mind.

"Tsk! A debuff spell? Seems like the black head can induce panic into its opponent. Shit, that monster has a good balance of skills!"

"...Hajime."

Yue watched Hajime curse at the troublesome enemy with her anxious eyes. It was a frightening scene. Being abandoned by Hajime. He was the person to risk his own life at unsealing her after 300 years. He who didn't treat her differently after she told him she was a vampire, and allow her to fed off of him day-by-day. It was unavoidable that her heart yielded.

The only place for Yue was besides

Hajime. How nice it was when they promised to return to Hajime's hometown together. She didn't even want to imagine being alone again. Therefore the planted nightmare was stuck in her head and ate her up. Hajime stands up at the sign of the Hydra recovering from the confusion. Yue detained him involuntarily when she grabbed his clothes.

"...I..."

She was shaking with an uneasy expression that was close to crying. Hajime finally understood what nightmare she saw and what she was currently thinking. In his usual manner, he was able to perceive her feelings. Either way, he had promised to take her to Japan.

There was no reason to pretend not to know.

He would probably be able to comfort her with words, but there was no time for that. If he said some half-hearted words, she would still fall prey to the black head's magic. There was a possibility that Hajime would mess up, but at that time he will follow Yue. While he thought of that excuse, Hajime scratched his head and squatted in front of Yue to meet her eyes.

And then...

"?...!?"

Hajime inclined his head and kissed Yue.

Their lips only touched a bit, but

Yue had a dramatic reaction. She just seriously stared at Hajime.

He diverted his eyes bashfully, and led her to stand with his hand.

"We will kill that beast and survive. Then, we will reach the surface and return home...together."

Yue started at Hajime in utter amazement, then her usual deadpan expression broke down to gently display a beautiful smile.

"Yes!"

Hajime cleared his throat to gather himself and informed Yue of the strategy.

"Yue, I'm going to use the Schlagen. It can't fire continuously, so please

cover me."

"...Leave it to me!"

Yue is suddenly full of motivation. Her quiet mutters were gone, and in place was a voice full of ambition. All the anxiety before vanished completely.

It seems like there had been a breakthrough in various ways. Hajime recalled his usual lack of independence, he thinks about the future, maybe he acted rashly. However, the Hydra performed an explosion. The beast roared as it pelleted the area Hajime and Yue were at with fireballs, wind blades, and ice shards.

Two people jumped out of the

shadow of the pillar and started their counterattack.

""Scarlet Spear"! "Imperial Cannon"! "Frozen Rain"!"

The trigger for the magic was activated rapidly. Magic built up at an impossible speed, an ice tornado accompanied a spiralling spear with vacuum blades whirling around it and a sharp needle attacks the Hydra all at once. She had aimed for the gap when they attacked and launched it towards the red, green, and blue head to force the yellow head to act. But it didn't move as the yellow head noticed Hajime aiming for the white head, it raised a roar.

"Kuruuan!"

Then a nearby pillar waved and it transformed into an impromptu shield. This yellow head seems to be able to use a skill similar to the scorpion's, though the scale was smaller.

Yue's magic hit the stone walls, it blasted through the vanguard of walls. The magic directly hit three of the heads.

"""Guruuuu!!"""

Three of the heads screamed and wriggled. When the black head's eyes caught Yue's it started to use its debuff magic.

Uneasiness wells up in Yue again. However, Yue remembers her kiss with Hajime before she is crushed

by the uneasiness. Then, her body got a passionate feeling and it washed away her anxiety.

"...It doesn't work anymore!"

In order to cover Hajime, Yue was casting spells rapidly and was emphasizing the number of spells rather than the power of them.

The red head that received healing, blue head, and green head resumed their attacks, and Yue contended with them by herself. They tried to counter each other.

While the three heads were occupied with Yue, Hajime approached the beast with a dash. He was going for a single killing blow, because it would be

troublesome if the beast had emergency measures it had yet to use. When the black head realized its magic didn't work on Yue, it looked for Hajime. The pain, hunger, and anxiety of his time in the abyss rose inside his chest. But...

"So what?"

It was the pasted that he endured a long time ago. Feeling those days were not a big deal now. Hajime blew away the black head with Donner.

The white head tried to recover the head in a split second, but before it could Hajime jumped into the air using his skills and aimed his Schlagen.

Just as he had assumed, the yellow had stood in the way of the shot for the white head.

"Then break together!"

Hajime creates a spark in the Schlagen with his "Lightning Clad". The bullet was a full metal jacket, the Tauru ore being covered by the Stall ore from the scorpion. Stall ore had a high affinity to magic and it suited "Lightning Clad" well. All the compressed combustion powder was ignited with the spark.

Bang!!

The red bullet was electromagnetically accelerated through the 1.5 m barrel with a tremendous explosive sound. This

gun was 10 times more powerful than Donner's maximum output. With his simple calculation, this rifle was 100 times more powerful than a normal anti-matter rifle. A monster weapon that was not possible without this world's special ore and magic.

When it was fired, the bullet made a red trail like it was a thick laser. Once, they thought Kouki's spell that was shot at the Behemoth was the trump card, but this made that look like child's play. Yellow head met the bullet directly as it burned through the air.

Although the yellow head had a defense like "Vajra"...but the bullet reached the white head like there was nothing there. The bullet

penetrated through everything like nothing as it blasted through the wall in the rear. Vibrations violently wracked the whole level as if an earthquake had happened.

What was left was two necks that looked like two heads had not even existed there. The open wound had been cauterized by the heat and made it seem like it never had those two heads. Debris was littered everywhere, and no one knew how long that bullet kept going only that it left a huge hole in the wall.

The other heads did not think that almost half of its heads could be extinguished in a single moment. Even Yue was staring at Hajime in utter amazement and had forgotten her enemy. Hajime landed flat on

the ground, There was smoke rising out of Schlagen's as the round was ejected. When the shell it the floor, the three heads regained its senses. All three pair of eyes glared at Hajime, but their previous opponent was not someone to take their eyes off of.

""Scorching Heaven"!"

Once the Vampire Princess. The existence that caused fear into her own people because of her talents, and caused them to seal her. Power pours into the spell and it was like Heaven's vengeance was being turned against it.

Immediately after, electric discharge started to gather around the 3 heads and soon 6 lightning

spheres surround the heads. Soon the electric discharge lengthened and connected all the spheres together, and created a huge lightning globe in the center.

Zugagagagagaga!!

When the globe burst, it rained down lightning of great power within the the limits of the 6 smaller spheres. The three heads tried to run, but the surrounding lightning spheres were acting like walls. As the wrath of God poured down from the sky, flashes and thunder filled the room.

Helpless, the three heads screamed in agony as it was charcoaled and erased by the superlative magic that lasted more than 10 seconds.

Like always, Yue collapsed into a sitting position after using that strong of a spell. She was breathing heavily at her magical exhaustion and in her expressionless face was her eyes that conveyed satisfaction; she gave Hajime a thumbs up to show her satisfaction. Hajime returned the gesture with his own thumbs up and smiled. He began to walk while he carried the rifle on his shoulder. The remaining parts of the Hydra was to the rear of him now that he made his way to Yue.

Just after that.

"Hajime!"

Yue's desperate voice sounded out. When he considered what was up, he followed her line of sight. There

in the Hydra's remains rose a seventh head that glared at him. Hajime stiffens unintentionally.

However, the seventh silver head, shifted its gaze to Yue and it let loose an aurora without any preparations. Like the Schlagen shot, the aurora shot towards Yue in an instant. She couldn't move because of magic exhaustion.

The moment the silver head turned to Yue, Hajime had jumped out as his body was attacked by chills.

Just like with the blue head earlier, Hajime was able to jump into the line of fire to save Yue. This time the results were different. The aurora was swallowing Hajime whole. Yue's body was blown away

by the aftereffect of the hit, even if it wasn't a direct hit.

Soon the aurora calmed down, and Yue sat herself up as her whole body was in pain. She searched for the figure of Hajime, as he had been swallowed by the aurora after he forced his way through to take the attack.

Hajime had not moved from the place he blocked the attack. He was in an imposing stance as smoke blew from his whole body. On the floor was the wreckage of the melted Schlagen.

"H-Hajime?"

"..."

He did not answer. His body just

shook and fell forward.

"Hajime!"

Yue quickly rushed over to him, ignoring her aching body as she is driven by uneasiness. Because of her magic drain, she couldn't gather any strength and fell. With a suppressed impatient feeling, she took out her sacred water and drank. Her vitality returned slowly and she rushed to Hajime this time.

Blood gradually begins to puddle under Hajime's stomach. The attack had penetrated Hajime's "Vajra" and did a lot of damage. If he had not used the Schlagen as a shield, he most likely would have died. Luckily, his Schlagen was a weapon made from the shell of the scorpion

that endured Yue's "Azure Sky".

When she turned him on his back, Hajime's condition was severe. His fingers, shoulder, and flank was burned and festering. Some of the parts even had bone exposed. The right side of his face was burned and his right eye was bleeding. There was not much damage to his legs, it was a blessing in disguise.

Yue was going to give him sacred water, but the Hydra wasn't going to allow that. The beast was shooting innumerable balls of light, 10 cm in diameter, this time. Its intensity could be comparable to a gatling gun.

She quickly held Hajime and exerted all her strength to hide

behind the pillars. Balls of light was shot one after another at the pillars, and causing the pillars to be shaved. It would not last even 1 more minute. Each of the light ball was loaded with terrifying energy.

Yue quickly dropped the sacred water into Hajime's wound, and tried to get him to drink another one. However, Hajime didn't have the power to swallow it, so he choked on it and spit some out. To get Hajime to drink it, Yue placed it in her mouth and kissed him. She forcibly made him drink it.

But the sacred water was not able to restore the wounds. Usually, the restoration began immediately, it seems like something was inhibiting it.

"Why!?"

Yue took out all the sacred water on hand as she began to panic.

The factor that was inhibiting the restoration was Hydra's poison in the aurora; the poison melt the flesh. It usually would have melted a being without resistance. However, the sacred water's restoration was faster than the dissolution speed of the poison. The speed was slow but with Hajime's enhanced body it would just take time to heal, but the right eye had evaporated with the auroral light. He would not be able to get it back because the sacred water could only restore, not regenerate.

Soon the pillar will be crushed, and

it did not seem Hajime will be able to move until then. Yue stares at Hajime with a determined expression as she kissed him. She took Donner and stood up.

"...This time, I'll save you..."

After her words of determination, she jumped out from behind the pillar. She only had a little magic and the sacred water was used up. With the body of a vampire that relied on body strengthening, she could only use Donner and her unreliable "Auto Regen".

The silver head glares at the Yue that had jumped out of the pillar it was bombarding. Since her magic reserve was low, she did not choose to fight it with magic. Instead she

chose to dodging and run because she couldn't fire Donner like Hajime. Originally, Yue was not good with close quarter combat. Instantly she was driven into a corner.

Finally, one of the balls hit Yue in the shoulder.

"Agu!"

Groaning in pain, she endured it and resumed her running after retaining her momentum. The moment she stopped because of the pain, would be the time she collapsed. Her "Auto Regen" began, but it was slower than usual. Seems the poison was even effective against her regen. The vampiress' magic reverse is cut again. In this

situation, the magical power used to enforce her body will disappear soon.

Yue tried to approach it but the density of the barrage prevents her. She wouldn't be able to shoot Donner if she couldn't get closer. A plan was needed to close the distance between her and the beast. However, the barrage was merciless and it finally cornered her.

In desperation, she pulled Donner's trigger to try to break the situation. Yue used a lightning spell to substitute the need for "Lightning Clad" acceleration. Count it as beginner's luck, the bullet went through the gaps of the barrage to hit the silver head's temple.

But,

"Eh"

Her voice leaked unintentionally. The blow should have some power even if she didn't have sufficient acceleration, but the silver head did not suffer much damage. Shadows of despair fell over her expression, but her defeat meant Hajime's death. She grit her teeth and prepared to evade again.

However, such a pattern couldn't continue on forever. The silver head's eyes shined and another aurora was shot that jarred the surrounding space. Yue's evasion route was limited by the light ball barrage so she choose to get blown away by jumping into the light

bullets. This allowed her to avoid the aurora.

The price for that was a light bullet to the abdomen and a slam into the ground.

"Uu...Uu..."

Her body couldn't move. If she didn't move, a barrage of light bullets was going to hit her. Yue knew this and struggled desperately, but her body doesn't listen. Her regeneration was too slow. She started to shed tears, unawared. It was mortifying, so unavoidably mortifying. Can she not protect Hajime by herself?

After the head had confirmed its victory over Yue, it roared and shot

its bullets of light.

The bullets of light approached Yue, but she did not close her eyes. To show that at least it hadn't defeated her heart, she glared at the head. Soon, her whole vision was being taken by the flash from the bullet. If it hit directly, it was death. She tried to apologize to Hajime for failing to protect him, as she said that she would go first.

An instant...a gust of wind blew.

"Eh?"

Yue realized that she was in someone's arms and the bullet stuck to the side. When she looked at the person, she couldn't believe her sight. It was unmistakably

Hajime. He was breathing heavily from his wounds and one of his eyes was shut, but he gave Yue a tight hug.

"Don't cry, Yue. It's your win."

"Hajime!"

She embraced Hajime filled with emotions. Most of his injuries had not healed. He was standing with pure willpower.

Hajime gazed at the silver head. The head glared back while making a bullet of light float in the surrounding. It threw the bullet so there would be no more discussion about who escaped death.

"So slow..."

Hajime did not move until the last moment, he fell down and evaded the bullet.

The head narrow its eyes and started to attack with numerous light balls.

"Hajime, run away!"

Yue told Hajime with a desperate expression, but Hajime was indifferent. He even embraced and danced rotations with Yue. They unsteady fell and avoided the bullets of light. When a light ball avoided Hajime, she seemed to have misunderstood.

She widen her eyes.

"Yue, suck my blood."

His silent eye and quiet voice urged her. Even normally, she hesitated to take his blood. While dodging the light bullets, Hajime embraced Yue and exposed his nape.

"Your magic is the last resort...Do it, Yue. We will win."

"...Okay!"

His strong words dwell within her, and she nodded. She believed in him and buried her face into his nape with her fangs. Yue's body is rapidly healed when Hajime's power flowed into her. The two of them were dancing around and avoiding the light bullet storm, while they embraced each other.

Now, the world grew dull in color

from his view. In the world of the monochrome, all things moved slowly. Only Hajime was moving as usual.

Hajime looked. The scene of Yue fighting by herself while his wavering consciousness tried to hold on. She was fighting desperately with his gun in one of her hands. When she fell on the ground and the beast started to emit the aurora to finish her off.

Fierce anger filled Hajime. What does he have to do? Would he be satisfied just sleeping here? To permit such unreasonableness to take his partner in such a place? Was he going to yield to such a beast?

Nay! Absolutely not! An enemy threatening his, no, their survival! The enemy,

"Kill!"

At that moment, Hajime felt a spark run through his head and awaken one of his skills. The final derivation of "Divine Step", [Light Speed]. By expanding the cognitive functions, it increased the efficiency of all the skill associated with "Divine Step" dramatically. Hajime has once again, "exceeded the wall".

Hajime arrives next to Yue in an instant with this skill and gently dodged the bullets of light.

Eventually, Yue finished sucking his blood and completely regained her

powers.

"Yue, when I give the signal, cast "Azure Sky". Until then, put your heart and soul into evading.

"Okay...and Hajime?"

"Me, spadework."

Hajime dropped Yue off behind the pillars and ran towards the silver head.

He dodges the incoming barrage of light and fires off Donner while using "Flicker". The beast wasn't able to stomach being hit again by the bullet so it dodged them. Bullets from Donner end up making holes in the ceiling.

Hajime kept changing the area he

shot at, but all the bullets only made holes in the surroundings. A sneerful glint was in the silver head's eyes. Yue was becoming uneasy but she believed in him. She waited for the signal to cast her spell.

He jumped into the air with "Air Walk" and fired off Donner. His delicate steps became possible which had not been possible in the match. Hajime jumped around in the air near the ceiling, dodging the barrage.

Irritated, the silver head gave off an aurora attack carelessly. Naturally, Hajime dodged it easily with a grin. Hajime had fathomed. The head became stiff while it did its aurora attack. Then he reloaded Donner

and shot at 6 different places. An intense explosion and shock occurred on the ceiling. After an instant of silence, it began to collapse in one go. The debris was 10 m in diameter and weighed dozens of tons. That large mass crushed into the silver head.

Hajime opens a hole in the ceiling with Donner, and prepared a grenade while he evaded. He made parts of the ceiling fragile with his transmutation. Then he shot at the 6 places and it exploded.

His attack did not slack. If just simple debris could defeat this monster, he wouldn't have that much trouble. Hajime approached the trapped and crushed silver head with "Flicker". Using his

transmutation, Hajime quickly changed the debris into restraints. At the same time, he created an impromptu blast furnace around the Hydra. He threw pouches containing incendiary grenades into the furnace and shouted.

"Yue!"

"Okay! "Azure Sky"!"

A pale sun appears in the blast furnace and melts the silver head that was restrained. There was a chain explosion inside, the power broke through its defense and the silver head suffered not negligible damage.

"Guuruaaa!!"

The death throes of the silver head.

It tried to violently run away and shoots off the light bullets randomly. Walls started to break but Hajime was there to repair them to prevent its escape. Hydra tried to use its aurora attack but the silver head melted in the high heat and was unable to shoot it.

Hajime's perception could not longer sense the hydra, as it disappeared from his senses. This time he was convinced of its death and collapsed backwards.

"Hajime!"

Yue crawled to him as her body had lost the ability to gather energy.

"Indeed...I'm spent..."

Hajime parted from consciousness

slowly as he felt Yue embracing him.

Chapter 22: Abode of Traitors

Hajime felt his whole body being wrapped by something warm and soft. It was a very nostalgic feeling. This is the feeling of a bed. A cushion was gently catching his head and back. The softness of feathers wrapped his body. His dozing consciousness was thrown into confusion.

(What is this? This is supposed to be the dungeon...Why is a bed...)

He was fumbling around as his consciousness was not fully awake yet. However, he couldn't move his right hand. It was wrapped in a soft

feeling that was different from the bed. His palm was also wedged into something warm and soft.

(What's this?)

Hajime moves his hand while he was still blank. He felt a certain elasticity between his hands and it was squishy when he touched it. Just keen on the feel somehow and it becomes a habit to keep touching...

"...Ahn.."

(!?)

For some reason a seductive gasp could be heard. At that moment, the first visage of his consciousness came back to him.

Hajime noticed as he raised himself in panic, that he really was in a bed. The bed had a pure-white sheet and it felt luxurious and it even had a canopy. It seems the bed was on a stone pavement in a terrace atrium. A refreshing breeze blew by Hajime's cheeks and the canopy. His perimeter was surrounded by pillars and a thin curtain. Can you imagine a bed in the center of a Parthenon shrine? The whole space was filled with a warm light that he hasn't seen in a long time.

He was confused, just a while ago he was in a desperate struggle fighting against the Hydra in the dungeon.

(Where is this? This place...don't tell me its the afterworld...)

In this place that felt so solemn, an ominous thought crossed his mind. Hajime thoughts were interrupted by an amorous voice next to him.

"....Hn...Hajime...Au..."

"!?"

When Hajime was confused, he turned over the sheet. While not wearing a single thread of clothing, Yue clinged onto Hajime's right hand and slept completely naked. He finally noticed that even he was naked.

"Indeed...is this the morning chirp...that's not right!"

The confused Hajime did a Tsukkomi on himself for his stupid thoughts. Yue started to wake up a

little.

"Yue, wake up. Yue."

"Hn~..."

When he tried to wake her up, she curled up and shook her head to fret. His right hands were between Yue's thighs and it was approaching a dangerous place.

"Ku....Don't tell me this is really the afterworld...is it Heaven?"

Hajime he was saying those stupid things, he tried to free his right hand, but everytime...

"....Hn....Hn..."

Yue panted seductively.

"Ku, calm down me. No matter how old she is, her appearance is still of a child. Impossible for me to get excited! I am absolutely not a lolicon!"

Hajime tried to persuade himself of this, while his expression was on the brink of looking like a pervert. He gave up trying to free his right hand, and instead tried to wake up the cause but no luck.

Gradually, he started to get irritated. Hajime could not swallow the situation and confusion, and he had a blue vein popping out on his forehead at her leisurely sleeping there.

His irritation culminated...

"That's enough, get up! This natural erotic vampire princess!"

He invoked his "Lightning Clad". Electric discharge started to gather in his right hand.

"!? Abababababababa"

Yue was shocked by the discharge. She released Hajime's arm and finally opened her eyes, while she twitched a little.

"...Hajime?"

"Yeah. It's Hajime-san. Sleepyhead, wake up..."

"Hajime!"

"!?"

She woke up and widened her eyes when she saw Hajime. The next moment, she jumped towards Hajime. In the nude. Hajime trembled.

Yue buried her face into Hajime's scruff. and he noticed she was sniffing. He decided there was no helping it, and just stroke her head with a smile.

"My bad, seems like I worried you a lot."

"Yeah....I was worried..."

It seems she didn't want to stop clinging for a while. He let her do it until she was satisfied because she did take care of him. Hajime continued to stroke her head gently.

When Yue calmed down after a few minutes, Hajime asked about what happened. By the way, he made Yue cover herself with the sheet.

"So, what happened since then? Where is this?"

"...After that..."

She said that after the battle, she felt dizzy from her magic depletion and snuggle right next to the collapsed Hajime. Then the double doors in the room automatically opened. Reinforcements? Yue stayed vigilant but nothing ever came. When she started to recover bit by bit, she decided to enter the door.

The sacred water was healing

Hajime little by little. Still, he was in a dangerous state with all his serious injuries. His tough body had escaped death, but she didn't know when the sacred water would lose to the poison. Both of them would be finished if a new monster appeared. Therefore, she had to check it out.

And in the depths of the door,

"...Abode of the Traitors."

Inside was a vast space with a good looking house in the center. Then, she confirmed it wasn't dangerous. Yue confirmed there was a bedroom and took the unconscious Hajime to it and nursed him. Recently, the God's Crystal extract was decreasing considerably. Hajime

had kept drinking the sacred water.

The sacred water finally beat out the toxins, and it was able to display its usual restorative prowess. Yue became exhausted eventually.

"...I see, you took care of me. Thanks, Yue."

"Hn!"

When Hajime conveyed his words of thanks, Yue's eyes brighten up joyfully from the bottom of her heart. She was expressionless but her eyes said all.

"By the way...why am I naked?"

He was curious. The morning chirp he wanted to break from. Hajime didn't dislike Yue...he just wanted to

prepare his heart. Inwardly, he just muttered to himself.

"...You were dirty...I cleaned you..."

"...Why did you lick your lips?"

Yue had a bewitching smile, like when she sucked his blood, and licked her lips. For some reason his body shivered.

"Why was Yue sleeping next to me? Also...naked..."

"...Fufu..."

"Wait, what are you laughing at? Did you do something? Don't lick your lips!"

While Hajime was questioning her intensely, Yue did not answered and

just stared at Hajime with a voluptuous look.

Hajime questioned for a while, but she had a happy expression as she remained quiet. He decided to give up on the questioning and explore the abode. Yue handed him some high-quality clothes she found. It was men's clothing. Most likely it was the traitor's. Hajime confirmed his good health then dressed himself with the clothes, and prepared his equipment. There might be some traps or tricks, so he prepared himself just in case.

When his preparation was also complete, he looked back and found Yue dressed. Yue was,

...she was in a one piece cutter shirt.

"Yue..what are you aiming for?"

"?...Size doesn't fit."

Oh, men's size would surely not fit Yue's height of only 140 cm. However, her appropriate sized breasts and pure white legs were on display. Her image was so sensational, contrary to her childish appearance, because of the way Yue held herself and acted. Hajime was troubled on where to keep his eyes.

"...If its natural, then its quite frightening..."

He wasn't sure if she was aiming for that or it just came natural. Hajime just knew she was terrifying in a variety of ways.

Leaving the bedroom, he was

amazed at the sights around him.

First, sunlight had entered his eye. It wasn't real because they were underground. There was a globe that had its cone-shaped body connected to the ceiling, and it was floating there shining. He felt slightly warm because it didn't feel artificial like a fluorescent lights. Hajime unintentionally called it "Sun".

"...It becomes like a moon when its night."

"Seriously..."

Next, the pleasing sounds of water entered his ears. To the back of the room was a door that lead to a small sized stadium. In the back

wall of this room was a waterfall. A large quantity of water ran down that wall from the ceiling and joined the river to flow into the back cave. The cool wind full of negative ions that blew from the waterfall provided a good feeling. When he took a closer look at the water, there were fish swimming there. Possible the fish flowed in from a terrestrial river.

Some distance from the river, there was a big field. Nothing seems to be planted there right now...it spread throughout the surrounding. It could be an animal pen. There was no sign of animals, but there was resources here to be self sufficient. Lots of varieties of plants grew around here too.

Hajime was on the opposite side of the river and field. He was encouraged to walk towards the adjacent building to the bedroom. The construction felt like processed rocked and it wasn't for dwelling.

"...I checked around a bit, there were many rooms that didn't open.."

"I see...Yue, don't let your guard down."

"Okay..."

The stone house was white and it texture was like lime; All of it felt so clean. In the entrance, there was a light sphere that was at the tip of a pedestal projecting from the ceiling. Hajime was dazzled with it because

he had been in the dark for so long. There seemed to be 3 stories, and there seemed to be an atrium at the top.

First, they wanted to look at the ground floor. They discovered a fireplace, soft carpet, living area with a sofa, a kitchen, and restroom. No signs pointed to the idea that these items had been neglected for years. There was no sign of life...but it had the feeling of return home after a trip. Hajime thought it had an air that told him it hadn't been used in a while. People did not live here, but it was still being maintained...

Hajime and Yue continued their exploration with caution. When they went into the interior they

were outdoors again. There was a hole in this huge place, and a sculpture of a lion was enshrined in deep water there. Next to the sculpture was a magic formation. When he poured magic into the formation, warm water jumped out of the lion's open mouth. The lion seemed to be able to arrange water from anywhere in the world.

"A bath. This is good. How many months has it been since I had a bath?"

He loosens his cheeks instinctively. The first time around, Hajime did not care about the dirt that was on his body. Since he was worried about itching, he gave in. Water was gathered using a huge magic formation he craved and he wiped

his body with the water.

However, Hajime was Japanese. He was no exception to the addiction for a bath. After he secured the area, he couldn't help himself from smiling.

Watching that Hajime, Yue said...

"...Enter? Together..."

"...Let me take it easy alone."

"Mu..."

Yue kicked the warm water with her barefeet. Hajime refused because if they entered together he wouldn't be able to relax. Her face showed how dissatisfied she was.

Both of them soon discovered a

study room and workshop on the second floor. However, there seemed to be seals that prevent the opening of the doors in those rooms. With no other choice, they continued their search.

The two headed to the third floor's back room. There was only one room on the third floor. When they opened the door into the interior, there was a 7-8 m wide exquisite and delicate magic formation engraved on the floor in the center of the room; the design was something they had never seen before. A rather splendid geometrical patterned formation and it looked like art.

However, something else was more noteworthy. On the other side of

the magic formation was a figure sitting in a regal chair. The figure was a corpse. It was already been skeletonized and there was a stunning black robe embroidered with gold on its body. There was not a single stain on it and it seemed to be an object from a haunted house.

The corpse hung its head, while leaning on the chair. It had been decayed in that posture. What did this person think of in this room with only a magic formation? Why did it choose this place, instead of the bedroom or living room?

"...Suspicious...What do you want to do?"

Yue was also wondering about the corpse. This person was probably

one of the traitors. No signs of suffering could be seen on the figure that rested on the chair. It seemed like the figure was waiting for someone.

"Well, if we want to reach the surface, I think this room is the key. The seals in the library and studio resisted my transmutation...so we have to investigate. Yue wait here, and if anything happens I'll leave it to you."

"Okay...Be careful."

Hajime stepped forward towards the magic formation. The moment he stepped into the center of the magic formation, a snow-white light flashes suddenly and the room is dyed with the light.

Due to the intensity, Hajime closed his eye. Something invaded into his head immediately after, and he went through the time he fell into the abyss like a revolving lantern.

The light soon settled and Hajime opened his eyes; in front of his eyes...was a young man in black clothing.

Chapter 23: True History

The magic formation shines faintly and fills the room with a mysterious light.

A young man was standing in front of Hajime, and if they looked closely the man was wearing the same robe as the corpse on the chair.

"You have arrived here after overcoming the trials. My name is Oscar Orcus. The person who created this dungeon. If I said one of the Traitors, would you understand?"

Seems like the person speaking was

Oscar Orcus. The creator of the "Orcus Dungeon". Hajime was surprised but kept listening.

"Ah, please don't ask questions. This is just a recording, unfortunately, it wouldn't be able to answer your questions. For the person to reach this place, I will impart the truth of the world and what we fought for...this is the leftover message. I took this shape. Please I want you to listen....We are traitors but we are also not."

Then Orcus started his story. This story was much different from the known history that the church taught and what Yue explained to him; it shocked him.

A tale of the battle between the

Mad God and his descendants.

During the first years after the Age of Gods, the world was filled with strife. Humans, Devils, and Demi-Humans were constantly at war with each other. The reason for their wars varies. Territorial expansion, ethnic values, greed, and much others. The biggest reason was "Enemy of God". During that time the races and countries were finely divided. Each of the race and country would worship their own god. For their god's oracle, they continued to wage their war.

After hundreds of years of countless battles, but there came people who wanted to end this war. The group was called "Liberators" during those days.

They all had a common connection. All of them were direct descendants of the gods that were followed in the Age of Gods. The leader of the "Liberators" had, by chance, found out the real intentions of the gods. The gods had urged the wars with the intention of having the people be the pieces in their war game. When he found this out, the leader set out on a mission. He gathered like minded people who would not stand for the gods manipulating the people and driving them to war for their games.

They located the place where the gods resided, "World of God". There were 8 of them that had the strength of ancestral times in "Liberators", and with their powerful strength challenged the

gods.

However, the plan fails before the fighting began. The gods were the puppet masters of the people, and they had gotten people to recognize the "Liberators" as the enemy of god that wanted to bring destruction to the world. People were made to be their enemies. There were complications in the process, after all, they couldn't wield their power against the people they were trying to protect. When the "Liberators" were defeated they were labeled as "Traitors", the traitors who forgot the grace of god and wanted to destroy the world.

At the end, their group had been dwindled to the 8 strongest. They were now the world's enemies and

they judged that they were not strong enough to strike down the gods. Each of them scattered around the continent and created the 8 Great Dungeon to hide in. The dungeon was a trial to find a worthy person to hand over their powers, and with it accomplish what they could not.

Orcus smiles gently after he finished that long story.

"I don't know who you are or what reason you arrived here for. I will not coerce you into killing God. However, I wanted you to know. What we stood for.

...To you, I grant my powers. You are free to use it as you will.

Please do not use this power to satisfy the evil in your heart.

Our conversation is at an end. Thank you for listening. Now your free will won't be under supervision."

After he finished what he said, the recorded image of Orcus disappeared. Something invaded Hajime's mind at the same time. His mind ached with a throb, but endured it quietly because it imprinted knowledge of a certain magic.

Soon, both the pain and magic formation settled. Hajime slowly exhaled.

"Hajime...are you okay?"

"Ah, I'm fine...kind of. I just heard something immense."

"...Okay...What do you want to do?"

Yue asked what he wanted to do, after he heard Orcus' story.

"Yeah? Nothing in particular? Being summoned without permission and asking them to fight a war was bothersome. I don't even know what's going on with this world. Looking for a way to the surface and going home. That's my only goal....Are you bothered by it, Yue?"

The previous Hajime would probably do something. However, his values had changed and it allowed him to ignore Orcus' plight. This world should have its own

people deal with their problems, but Yue was as resident of this world. Since he couldn't leave her alone, he had to consider what she wanted. He couldn't cut off Yue like he did Orcus because their relationship was a lot closer. Hajime asked her for her thought, but after a slight hesitation she shook her head.

"My place is here...others I don't care."

She snuggled up to Hajime and took his hand. Yue tried to convey her true feelings as she grasped his hand. In the past, she devoted everything for her country. Betrayed by those she trusted and not a single person saved her. For Yue after her long imprisonment, this

world was just a prison to her.

Hajime was the one to save her from her prison. That is why being beside Hajime was her everything.

"...Is that so."

Hajime was slightly embarrassed. He cleared his throat to disguise it, and tells the shocking truth without hesitation.

"Ah, I also learned some new magic...Age of Gods magic it seems."

"...Really?"

Yue had an expression that said she didn't believe him, but it was expected. The magic used in the Age of Gods were lost to the

modern world. It was transition magic that summoned him and the others here, and that was an Age of Gods magic.

"This magic formation on the floor can fiddle with your brain and teach you to use it. It seems like."

"...Are you okay?"

"Yeah, no problem. This magic...seems like its the magic for me."

"...What kind of magic?"

"Well, I think its called Creation Magic. You can add magic into minerals with it, and the added magic can give special properties to the minerals."

Yue jaw-dropped at Hajime's explanation.

"...You can make artifacts."

"Ah, I can do that."

Creation Magic was used to create artifacts during the Age of Gods. Like this magic was made for "Transmutation Master". The truth was Orcus' class was "Transmutation Master".

"Why don't you learn, Yue? Entering this magic square and it will explore your memories. Orcus said something about a trial and you may learn it if it judges that you passed the trial."

"...I don't use transmutation..."

"Mah, that's true but...its magic from ancient times? It wouldn't hurt to learn it?"

"...Okay...if Hajime says so."

Yue walks to the center of the magic formation just like Hajime advised. The magic formation shines as it searches through Yue's memories. Now the moment of truth of its verdict...

"You have arrived here after overcoming the trials. My name is Oscar..."

Orcus appeared again. There was a spoiled feeling. Hajime and Yue ignored Orcus' story and kept talking to each other.

"Did you learn it?"

"Yeah. But...artifact is difficult."

"Yeah, it seems that Ancient Magic might have affinities and suitability."

While the two were talking with each other, near them was Orcus talking and smiling to nothing. It was very surreal. Hajime thought he saw the corpse look sad, but wrote it off as his imagination.

"Ah, for the time being, this place is ours now, do you want to tidy up the corpse."

Hajime did not have any compassion.

"Un...fertilize the field..."

Yue also did not have any

compassion.

Even though there was no wind, Orcus' body hung its head.

Orcus' body was buried at the end of the field, and a gravestone was erected there. As expected, treating him like fertilizer was too pitiful.

When they finished with the burial, Hajime and Yue went to the sealed rooms. They had received a ring that Orcus had worn. Don't call them grave robbers. On the ring was an engraved pattern that was crosswise in the circle, and the pattern was the same as the seals in the library and studio.

First, they headed to the study.

Their first purpose was to search

for a way to the surface. Hajime and Yue unlocked the seal on the bookshelf and checked it for anything notable. They discovered the designs for the whole dwelling. Although it wasn't to the degree of a blueprint, where what went, it was a memo of where certain buildings would be placed.

"Bingo! It has it, Yue!"

"Un"

A voice of delight escapes from Hajime. Yue is also joyful. According to the plan, the magic formation on the third floor was also connected somehow to a formation on the surface. The magic would not activate without Orcus' ring. Stea...Accepting that

ring was a good idea.

When they examined the plan more, there was an independent golem in the studio that maintained this dwelling periodically. The light from the globes on the ceiling had the same property as natural sunlight. This meant that crops and other things that rely on sunlight could be grown. It seems the reason this place felt so clean, even when no life was here, was because of the golem.

The studio acted as a storage for all the artifacts and materials Orcus had made during his lifetime. These items were stole...transferred to them. There were quite a lot of devices.

"Hajime...this."

"Yeah?"

Yue had been investigating the other documents while Hajime checked the plans, and brought him one of the books. The book was Orcus' memoir. Inside the memoirs were the written the daily lives of former comrades, especially about the 8 core members of the "Liberators".

Within the passages, one of them was related with the Dungeons the other 7 made.

"....In other words, its that? If we conquer the other dungeons, we would obtain the creator's Ancient magic?"

"...Maybe."

According to the memoirs, just like Orcus, the other 7 "Liberators" were prepared to teach their Ancient Magic to those that conquer their dungeon and reach the final floor. Unfortunately the types of magic was not written...

"...Maybe we found a way home."

Just as Yue said, there was a possibility. The transition magic that summoned beings from other world was an Ancient Magic.

"Looks like we have a guideline from now on. To conquer the 8 Great Dungeons when we return to the surface."

"Yeah."

Hajime loosen his cheeks as he got the guideline. He instinctively patted Yue's head, and her eyes squinted joyfully.

They were looking for more information, but they weren't able to find any data that showed the exact locations of the dungeon. Currently, the confirmed dungeons were "Mountain of Great Flames" around the Guruyuen Desert, and "Hartzena Sea of Trees". The rumored dungeons were "Raisen Great Canyon" and "Schnee Snowfield". They had no choice but to investigate all of them.

Satisfied with their search of the study, the two moved to the studio.

There were a lot of small rooms in

the studio and they could open them all with Orcus' ring. Inside them were various never seen before ores and work tools. Theory books crowded the area and it could be mistaken as a paradise for Transmutation Masters.

Hajime folded his arms and pondered as he looked over the studio. When Yue saw him in that state, she looked puzzled and voiced it.

"...What's up?"

After being lost in thought for a while, Hajime proposed to Yue.

"Umm, that is Yue. Can we stay here for a bit? I want to quickly get to the surface but...there are many

things to learn and this is the best base. When thinking about conquering the other Dungeon, I want to prepare as much as possible here. How about it?"

Yue had been sealed underground for 300 years and she did not want to lose a second in getting to the surface. However, after becoming speechless at Hajime's proposal; she immediately approved. Strangely, it was Hajime who thought that...

"...Anywhere is fine if Hajime is there."

That's how it is. Hajime tried to hide his embarrassment at Yue's surprise declaration.

Both of them decided to train and equip themselves as much as possible here.

* * *

Omake

Evening of that day, the sun in the ceiling had changed into a moon and gave off a pale light. Hajime let his whole body relax as he soaked in the bath. After falling into the abyss, this was the first time he had loosened up. A bath was often said to cleanse the mind.

"Phew, this is the best."

A voice that was unthinkable for the current Hajime's nature came out. When he loosened his whole body, he suddenly heard footsteps.

The completely off-guard Hajime shivered. Although he said he would enter alone!

Of course, the one to make the sounds and enter the bath was...

"...Ah...feels so good..."

Yue immediately sat down near Hajime, stark naked.

"...Yue-san, didn't I say I'll enter alone?"

"...I refused."

"Wait a minute! I know that material!"

"..."

"...At least cover your front. There

are plenty of towels."

"Rather look."

"..."

"...Eh."

"...Ah, I've been hit."

"...No you haven't."

"Why do you know that material? Fine, I'll go!"

"I wont' let you go!"

"Wa-Wait! Ah, Ahhhhh!!!"

I will leave the rest to your imagination.

* * *

Omake 2

Kaori's side.

"What's this? Suddenly there is Killing Intent..."

"Kaori!? There is a Hannya behind you!"

Chapter 24: Departure

Two months have passed since Yue showed Hajime the dignity of a senior, and various breakthroughs were made from that night. As for Hajime, who continued enhancing his body and heart against the crazy monsters in the abyss, lost to Yue's onslaught. He decided to take it seriously and accept it.

Hajime was aware of Yue's feelings, on top of that he did promise to take her with him. His reason for withstanding her approach was his stance on not allowing something take his attention until he achieved his objectives. Now he had

conquered the dungeon and established a secure base. His goal was partially achieved when he discovered information and a plan to return home, and now his mind was allow to think about other things. His fragile reason couldn't oppose Yue's approach. Moreover, his reason didn't exist anymore.

The two of them made full use of the base. If anyone saw from the side they would likely yell: "Riajuu should explode!!" everyday. Far away, a Hannya mask floated around a female student. Her best friend had been frequently frightened by the situation, but that's another story. These were the preparation for the bloodshed in the near future.

"...Hajime, does it feel good?"

"Yeah, feels good."

"Fufu...Then, here?"

"Ah, that's good too."

"Better...I'll make it feel even better."

Currently, Yue was giving Hajime a massage. They weren't doing anything erotic. Why were they doing a massage? Because of Hajime's left arm. The massage was given on a regular basis to help his body get familiar with the prosthetic attached to his left arm.

His prosthetic arm is an artifact, and it could make like a real arm with the direct manipulation of

magic. The arm had a pseudo neural mechanism, it allowed the touch sensation by using magic to send signals to the brain to perceive it. For its appearance, the arm had a silver luster with black lines running along it. In certain parts of the arm, there were magic formations and patterns engraved in it.

The arm was fitted with a large number of gimmicks. He had designed it similar to the items in the studio that were Orcus' works, but Hajime added some of his original elements into it. A lot of special ores made with Creation Magic was used. If it was out in the world, this artifact would no doubt be an article of rare beauty that would be a national treasure. Of

course, ordinary people couldn't use it because you needed direct magic manipulation to operate it.

In two months their abilities and equipment were enhanced; they weren't anything like their previous selves. Hajime's current status.

Name	Nagumo Hajime
Age	17 Years Old
Gender	Male
Class	Transmutation Artist (Synergist)
Level	30
Health	980/980
Magicka	1,650/1,650
Strength	98
Defense	98
Agility	98
Magic Resistance	98

Skills

- Transmutation
  - Mineral Appraisal
  - Precision Transmutation
  - Mineral Enquiry
  - Mineral Separation
  - Mineral Fusion
  - Replica Transmutation
  - Compression Transmutation
- Magic Manipulation

    - Magic Emission
    - Magic Compression
    - Remote Control

- Iron Stomach
- Lightning Clad
- Divine Step
    - Air Walk
    - Flicker
    - Grand Legs
    - Light Speed
- Air Claws
- Night Vision
- Far Vision
- Perception
    - Special Perception
- Magic Perception
    - Special Perception
- Heat Perception
    - Special Perception
- Hide Presence
    - Phantom Step
- Poison Resistance

- Paralysis Resistance
- Petrification Resistance
- Panic Resistance
- All Elemental Resistance
- Foresight
- Varja
- Grand Arm
- Coercion
- Telepathic Communication
- High-Speed Magic Recovery
- Magic Conversion
    - Vitality
    - Healing
- Limit Break
- Generation Magic
- Language Comprehension

Levels showed the current degree of growth and the limit was 100 for a person. However, did his body change so much after eating too much demon flesh? The level stopped changing but his stats kept going up. Finally, it displayed those ??? for his level.

Hajime's growth after he consumed demon flesh was a very abnormal, if you think about his initial values and his growth rate. When his body went into its alteration it seems his growth limit also increased; just like his stats increased. He guessed that the Status Plate was no longer able to measure his limits.

By the way, the limit of Kouki's Hero class was 1500 for all stats. He could temporarily triple his stats with "Limit Break", but it still was ? of Hajime's stats. Moreover, Hajime could quintuple his stats with his skill and magic manipulation. You can understand how he is a cheat now.

For comparison, the normal humans of this world had stat

limits of 100-200. If they had a class then it could be 300-400. The Devils and Demi-humans, depending on the tribe traits, could range from 300-600 as their limit. If a Hero was cheat, then Hajime was more or less a monster. This wasn't really a mistake because his body and mind had changed...

Let's introduce the new equipment.

First, Hajime obtained a useful device known as "Treasure Box".

This was a ring type artifact that Oscar kept. There was a 1 cm red jewelry attached to the ring, and this jewel could make a space where it could store items. In short, it was like a hero's tool bag. Hajime did not know the exact size of the

space, but it was a considerable size. There seemed to be free space still after putting in all the equipment, tools, and materials. Anything can be deposited or withdrawn by just pouring magic into the formation on the ring. Withdrawn items can be placed anywhere within a 1 m radius.

It is an extremely convenient artifact, especially useful for the one armed Hajime. If the ring could transport anything to any place than Hajime thought he could use it to reload. When the tested it, it was half a success. As expected, it did not have the precision to directly transfer the bullet into the magazine. The limit was the transfer had a certain range it could align the bullet's orientation. He

might be able to use it when he became more skilled with the transmission.

Hajime decided to train to load a magazine with this transferring skill in the air. The important note is he was reloading in the air. Donner was a revolver that had a cylinder that swung out. Naturally, because the exposure of the cylinder was less than that of a top break revolver, it would require a superhuman technique to reload in the air. He wanted to use it in actual combat, not as a street performance, so it became more difficult. Hajime thought about remodeling it to a top break style but decided against it because it weakened the intensity in the trial.

After intense training for one month, Hajime had mastered this aerial reloading. Why was he able to master such a superhuman technique with just one month training? His secret was "Light Speed". This Special Magic had the ability to raise the user's cognitive functions. With this, he was able to slow the world down in his mind and aerial reloading became possible. There was a large burden to his body when he used it, so he couldn't use it for very long. However, it was perfectly fine to use it for his fast reloading.

Next, Hajime manufactured "Magic 2-Wheel Drive and 4-Wheel Drive".

Literally, these were 2 and 4 wheels driven by magic. The two-wheel was

an American type, and the four-wheel was designed like a military vehicle Hummer type. He used the tar shark resilience for the wheels because of its excellent elasticity. Tauru ore was the basis for all the parts. In the studio storage was Azantium Ore, at least that's what Oscar's book called it. Surfaces of the parts were coated with this ore, known as the world's hardest ore. Even Donner's maximum output probably wouldn't be able to pierce through that durability. There was no complex structures like engines. The vehicle was driven by Hajime's own magic or the magic stored in the fragment of God's Crystal. Speed was proportional to the amount of magic.

In addition, there were devices

fitted to the bottom of these two vehicles. When magic is poured into these devices, it will start to level the ground with transmutation magic. This would allow them to travel off-road in most places. Also, the vehicles were fully loaded like some spy car. Hajime was a boy. He was passionate about anything related to military. When he was too absorbed in it, Yue would pout. But her mood would improve when he spoiled her in various ways.

"Devil Eye" was another tool he developed.

Hajime lost his right eye when he fought the Hydra. His whole eye was evaporated by the heat of the Aurora attack, and he couldn't get it back with sacred potion because he

had lost it before he drank it. Yue was worried about it, so she devised and made "Devil Eye".

Even with Creation Magic, it was not possible to make a normal "eyeball". However, using Creation Magic, she was able to apply "Magic Perception" and "Foresight" to the God's Crystal. The Devil Eye was successfully created and it gave a very unusual but special sight.

Using the same pseudo nerves used in the artificial arm, the Devil Eye could send images to the brain to perceive. Devil eye did not grant normal vision. Instead, it could recognize the flow, strength and attribute of magic by color. He could see the core of the invoked magic.

What is the magic core? It is the thing that maintains and operates invoked magic...it seems. After invoking the magic, the magic is operated by the magic formation; he knew that. However, he had never thought about how the formula was linked with distant magic. None of the books and instructors had even mentioned anything about it. Probably it is a new discovery. Even Yue the magic expert didn't know anything about it.

The normal "Magic Perception" was the same as "Perception". It was only able to perceive a vague sense of number and location. Monsters that could hide their senses affected the effectiveness of the skills. With Devil Eye, he would be able to know

what magic and how strong the magic the opponent is using. Hajime could even destroy the magic if he pierce the core of the magic. However, shooting it would be like putting a bullet through a pinhole; it would require a lot of accuracy.

God's crystal was used because it could retain these magic better than other materials. Hajime supposed that the reason was its ability to contain a vast amount of magic. Since he was still inexperienced with Creation Magic, he wasn't able to grant three or more magic. With the God's Crystal potential, they may be able to install many more magic into it when he is skilled enough; Hajime hoped.

Because they used the God's Crystal for the Devil Eye, it constantly gave off a pale light. Hajime's right eye constantly shined. There was no way to stop the glowing, so Hajime reluctantly put on a black eyepatch made of thin cloth.

White hair, artificial arm and an eyepatch. Hajime had completely became a Chuuni character. Calm down left arm! His figure seemed to say. When he saw himself in the mirror he despaired and entered an ORZ state. He stayed in bed for a whole day, and Yue tried to comfort him by various means....everyone didn't want to talk about it.

About new weapons, Schlagen was revived after its destruction by the Hydra. The gun was strengthened

using Azantium ore. Since he no longer had to worry about carrying it, he lengthened the barrel to 3 m. A scope was created with "Far Sight" installed and attached to the gun. This increased its maximum effective range to 10 km.

Hajime remembered the struggle he had when he was chased by the horde of raptors. He developed a gatling railgun: Metsurai. Fires 30 mm caliber rounds at 12,000 rounds per minute through its 6 barrels. The barrels were created from special ores that had cooling effects installed by creation magic, but it still couldn't be used for more than 5 minutes continuously. If it overheats, it needs a 10 minute cooling period.

For surface supremacy, Hajime developed a rocket and missile launcher: Orca; purely because it was his interest. In the back was a 12-round rotary magazine for continuous fire, and it had an elongated barrel. He also had various kinds of rockets.

He even created another revolver to pair it with Donner: Schlag. Hajime could use both now that he had his artificial left arm. Using both at the same time, Hajime would be able to use Gun Kata as his basic tactics. With Yue as the typical rear guard, he considered close combat to efficiently cooperate with Yue. However, Hajime could be an all-rounder if he was properly equipped.

Other various equipment and tools were developed. However, contrary to being fully equipped, the God's Crystal was finally depleted of its sacred water. Only 12 tube containers were left of the sacred water. They tried to pour magic into the God's Crystal, but wasn't able to extract sacred water. Maybe after many years of concentration it would flow again.

Throwing away the God's Crystal would be a waste. It had saved his life...his lucky stone. Good luck piled up with good luck, he would be dead if he didn't arrive at this crystal. Hajime was extraordinarily attached to it because of that. Loneliness was unbearable to a survivor and painted a visage on his belonging. It was about the same as

giving it a name and admiring it.

Hajime used the crystal's ability to contain enormous amount of magic; to make necklace, earrings, rings and other accessories with transmutation. He gave them to Yue. She was able to use very powerful magic. Her most powerful spells consumed a lot of magic, and just one shot would leave her depleted. If she was able to stock up her magic in a battery, she could use those superlative magic in rapid succession and not get magically exhausted.

He named the accessories set "Magic Crystal Series" and gave it to Yue. Her reaction at that time...

"...Proposal."

"Say What?"

Yue jumped at the first time hearing Hajime unintentionally using Kansai dialect with his Tsukkomi.

"It prevents magic exhaustion. I thought this would surely protect Yue from now on."

"...It is a proposal."

"No, that's wrong. Just new equipment."

"...Hajime, so shy."

"...Recently, you're not listening to people."

"...Even shy in bed."

"Will you stop!? Seriously, such a thing!"

"Hajime.."

"Ah, What is it?"

"Thanks...I love it."

"Oh."

Please, really explode already! These two were creating their own atmosphere. They were ready for everything in a lot of ways.

Ten days after that, Hajime and Yue were setting off for the surface.

While they were activating the magic on the third floor, Hajime told Yue in a quiet voice.

"Yue...My weapons, and our powers are heresy on the surface. The church and countries will not remain silent."

"Nn..."

"They will demand our weapons and artifacts. There is a high possibility they will coerce us into participating in their war."

"Nn..."

"This may be a dangerous trip that turns the world against us. No matter how many lives you have, it might be insufficient."

"At this late of time..."

Hajime wryly smiled at her words. He gently stroke her fluffy hair, as

she stared straight at him.

Yue squinted her eyes from the pleasant feeling. He took a moments pause, and stared back at the sparkling red eyes. Hajime put his wish and resolution into words, as he inscribed it into his soul.

"I will protect Yue, Yue will protect me. So we are the strongest. All will be mowed down, and we will cross worlds."

At his words, Yue grasped both hands in front of the chest tightly; almost like a hug. Her expressionless face vanished to reveal a blooming smile. And answered like always,

"N~!"

Chapter 25: The Empire and the Heroes I (Classmate Side 3)

We go back in time a little...

Around the time when Hajime defeated the Hydra in mortal combat, the party of heroes had temporarily aborted their dungeon clearing and returned to the Kingdom of Hairihi.

The clearing speed had fallen due to a lack of the comprehensive intelligence they had on the floors up till now, and also due to the

strength and trickiness of the monsters. As such, intense member fatigue had resulted – the conclusion was to take a break and rest.

But though the rest town of Horuado would have been good for recuperation, someone was sent to meet them: they had to return to the palace. An envoy of the Hoelscher Empire had come wanting to meet with the heroes.

What was with this timing?

By nature, almost no time had passed between the arrival of the God Ehit's oracle and the summoning of Kouki and company. For this reason, the empire –which was an ally and did not itself

conduct the hero summoning– would not be able to meet the heroes right after they were summoned.

However, it had been thought that the empire had not moved even after knowing of the heroes' summoning. This was because the empire had been founded 300 years ago by famous mercenaries, becoming a 'holy land' for adventures and sell-swords with its meritocratic system.

For them, talk of a group of heroes suddenly appearing and leading humanity was unconvincing. The Church was also in Hoelscher, and as such it was not an exception to having believers, but they were less devout than those in Hairihi. Most

of its people were either mercenaries or were involved in the business, and as such there were more who valued profits over faith. If anything, this was just a story; it would hardly make earnest believers out of them.

Based on that, it was possible that they had made light of meeting up with Kouki and the rest just after their summoning. Of course, they were not against openly showing an obeisant attitude towards God in front of the church. While Haihiri would have been happy to patronize such a meeting, the empire –particularly His Imperial Majesty– had not been interested, and as such had not been involved.

However, the fact that this raid on

the [Orcus Dungeon] had succeeded in breaking through the 65th floor, beating out the previous record, piqued the interest of the empire. So they sent word that they would like to meet, and both the church and Hairihi were quick to agree.

After this news was meticulously related to Kouki and company on the carriage, they arrived at the palace.

The carriage entered the palace, and upon their descent from it they saw a figure of a boy coming towards them. He was around ten, and had blonde hair and blue eyes. The atmosphere around him was similar to Kouki's, but which much more mischief in it. This was

Randell S. B. Hairihi, Prince of the Kingdom. His air could be likened to that of a dog with flopping ears and wagging tail as he rushed up to them calling in a loud voice:

"Kaori! You made it back! I've been waiting!"

Of course, Kaori was not the only one there, for the returning expedition was present in full force. To them, it was easy to imagine what Randell's feelings were just by looking at his attitude – apart from Kaori he saw no one else.

In fact, Prince Randell had been making aggressive approaches towards Kaori since the day after they had been summoned. That said, he was only ten. In her view he

could only be recognized as an emotionally attached child, and there was no sign of her feelings ripening beyond that. For a person as innately kind as her, he would be like a cute younger brother.

"It's been a while, Your Highness."

(TN: She says 'Randell-dono', but I'm the kind of translator who gets into hissy fits about putting random Japanese into my sentence when the English equivalent serves perfectly fine.)

The imaginary tail wagged furiously up and down at her small smile, as Randell instantly turned red. Despite that, he managed to make a masculine expression before making another 'approach' toward

Kaori.

"Ah, it's been a long time indeed. When you said you were going to the dungeon, I felt as though I had died. Were you hurt? If I was stronger, I would never let you do such a thing..."

Randell bit his lip in annoyance. Even though Kaori refused to only be protected, the heartwarming feelings of the boy still caused her cheeks to soften.

"Thank you for your concern. But I'm alright, you know? I wish to do this."

"No, Kaori isn't suited for fighting. Th, there should, you know, be safer things you can do."

"Safer things?"

Kaori inclined her head at his words, and at this he turned an even deeper shade of red. Observing this amusing exchange from the side, Shizuku could only smile wryly as she considered the young man's valiant 'approach'.

"Mmhmm. For example, how about being a maid? You can work exclusively for me, starting today."

"As a maid? I'm sorry, but I'm a healer..."

"T-then, going to the Medical Institute is fine too. There's no need to go to dangerous places like the dungeons or the frontlines right?"

The Institute was a state-run

hospital, situated right beside the royal palace. In short, Randell hated being apart from Kaori. However, the feelings of the young boy would not move Kaori's obstinacy.

"No, I won't be able to heal them immediately if I'm not on the frontlines. Thank you for worrying about me."

"Uu..." Randell groaned softly, realizing that he could not move Kaori's determination.

"Your Highness, Kaori is my precious childhood friend. As long as I am around, I will definitely continue to protect her!"

From Kouki's viewpoint, he was being one-hundred-percent-

beneficent in comforting a younger boy, but those were not the right words for that moment. In the eyes of the lovestruck Randell, this was translated as such:

"I won't let my woman leave me. I definitely won't hand Kaori over to anybody!" (TN: The first bit is a bit dodgy, since my ability to recognize that variant on the kanji for 'hand' is currently failing me.)

The hero and the healer snuggling up intimately – that was a likely picture in his mind. His expression twisted in annoyance, Randell levelled a 'you are my mortal enemy' glare at Kouki. To him, they looked like lovers.

"What are you saying? You think

nothing of sending Kaori into dangerous places. I won't lose to you! Kaori being with me is the better decision."

> (TN: chauvinist pig, he uses the word kimatteiru, which indicates a decision without the target (Kaori's) individual input. i.e. "it has been decided" versus "I/you have decided")

"Umm, well."

At the hostile words that Randell spoke, Kaori was at a loss and just smiled weakly, while Kouki was speechless. Shizuku, seeing Kouki like this, could only sigh.

Before Kouki could say anything more to aggravate the already

growling, angered prince, a cool but authoritative voice rang out.

"Randell. Behave yourself. Can't you see Kaori is troubled?"

"B, big sister! ...B, But!"

"No buts. Even though everyone is tired – to detain them in this place... who is it who isn't thinking about others?"

"Ugh...B, but!"

"Randell?" (TN: I imagine she is projecting some kind of dark aura at him right about now.)

"E..errand! I remember, I had an errand to run! Excuse me!"

Refusing to admit his error, Randell

turned on his heel and fled. Seeing his back fade from view, Princess Liliana spoke with a sigh.

"Kaori, Kouki-san, I'm sorry about my brother. My apologies on his behalf."

Liliana lowered her head as she said that, causing her beautiful, straight blonde hair to flow downward.

"Mm, don't worry about it, Lili. Prince Randell was just concerned."

"I agree. Still, I don't understand why he got angry...I didn't say anything rude that I had to apologize for."

Kaori and Kouki said this as Liliana smiled thinly. Understanding well the sibling love between an older

sister and her younger brother, Kaori sympathized with Liliana to some extent for having a brother completely ignorant of her feelings. Above all, it was important that the 'mortal enemy' knew that she was separate from this matter.

> (TN: I'm just not so sure about this, my Japanese is bad and I'm sorry XD)

By the way, the meetings between Randell and his 'mortal enemy' would cause a big stir...but that's another story.

Liliana was a talented lady of fourteen years. Golden haired and blued eyed, she was both beautiful and popular amongst the people. Earnest, but not too obstinate, and

good at reading the mood, she was even able to interact openly with the servants.

She, as a princess and as a person, had been quite anxious as to the state of Kouki and the other summoned students. This was due to a sense of guilt about dragging them into problems of her world, which should have been their concern.

For that reason, she took the initiative to get to know the students, and it had not been long before they became well acquainted. She got along especially well with Shizuku and Kaori who were around the same age as her, by this point they had dropped all honorifics, electing to speak

casually with one other and even giving each other nicknames.

"No, Kouki-san. There is no need to worry about Randell. He just tends to be a bit reckless. More importantly...Once again, welcome back, everyone. I am heartily glad that you all returned safely."

Saying this, Liliana smiled gently. Even those classmates who were standing close to beauties like Kaori and Shizuku all blushed when they saw her smile. There was a refined elegance of royalty in her that the two of them did not have, something that most young women could not compete with using beauty alone.

In fact, Nagayama's group and the

delinquent group were also crimson from having their hearts stolen; even female members were slightly dyed in the cheek. For ordinary modern day students, the aura of a bona fide Otherworldly Princess was too much. Those who could bear it, like Kaori and those already close to the princess, were abnormal in this regard.

"Thank you, Lili. Your smile has blown my fatigue away. I too am glad to see you," Kouki said such affected lines with a refreshing smile. Though it has been repeated often, Kouki did not have any ulterior motive in saying this. He was truly glad to be alive, and to meet a friend once again – he was just pathologically unaware of the effects his words and actions had.

"R, re, really? U, um..."

As a princess, Liliana was used to the compliments and flattery paid by the gentry, imperial envoys and the people of the cities and towns. As such, she had trained herself to become adept at looking past these masks and discerning their true intentions. Thus she could see that there was no such thing in Kouki's words. Unused to such experiences outside of her family, Liliana's cheeks too went red, and she became flustered and unable to respond.

> (Author: it seems this kind of 'gap' is very popular.)

Kouki, as usual, just continued laughing and smiling, not realizing

at all the effects his behavior had. And as expected, this caused Shizuku to sigh deeply. Someone worrisome had taken the stage, and yet the person himself would resolutely fail to notice it.

"Um, anyway, thank you all for your hard work. Preparations for the meal and baths have already been completed, so please make yourselves at home. The imperial envoys will take a few more days to arrive, so you needn't worry about that."

Having recovered her balance, Liliana urged them thus.

While Kouki and the others were unwinding the fatigue accumulated in the dungeon, the groups who had

stayed behind heard of Behemoth's defeat, and jubilant shouts went out amongst them. After this, the number of people who returned to the frontline increased. Aiko-sensei's title of "Goddess of Fertility" also became a topic at this point, which caused her to writhe* quite a lot.

> (TN: I think he meant 'cringe', 'writhe' feels too strong, but it's the word of my dictionary and I don't know better)

Kouki and the others slowly rested their bodies, which had been exhausted from the raid.

But inwardly Kaori was restless; she desired to return to the dungeon.

Chapter 26: The Empire and the Heroes II (Classmate Side 3)

Continuing from the previous...

3 days later, the imperial envoys finally arrived.

Currently, Kouki, the dungeon clearing members, leaders of the kingdom, and a delegation of priests led by Ishtar were out in full force to receive the five envoys, who were standing in the middle of the red carpet opposite King Erihid (TN: is this his name?)

"It was good of you to come, sir envoys. Do well, therefore, to make certain of our heroes' surpassing valour."

"Your majesty, you have our thanks indeed for accepting this sudden request for an audience. That said... may we know the identity of the Hero?"

"Mm. We will introduce him first. Sir Kouki, would you step forward?"

"Yes."

The unveiling of Kouki and the others followed immediately after the formal salutations between the king and the messengers, with the King calling him to appear before them. Despite the fact that not even

two months had passed, his look was utterly fearless, quite unlike when first summoned.

While they were not here, if the palace maids, noble ladies and Kouki's fans in the stay-behind group saw him now they would without a doubt start going red in the face and releasing heated sighs of fascination. Those who had made advances on Kouki already numbered in the double digits...but due to his extreme denseness, their approaches were just those of "warm and friendly people" to him. A naturally dense hero was walking the earth.

(TN: This is one of the things I think the author absolutely has to fix if this webnovel becomes an LN

– these asides that are basically like 'wut, what, where?' moments in terms of plot. I know he's trying to funny, but still...)

After this the heroes were introduced, starting from Kouki.

"Oh, so you are the heroes. Quite young, I must say. Pardon my rudeness, but did you truly break through the 65th floor? If memory serves, a monster known as the Behemoth appears there..."

While scrutinizing Kouki, the messenger also took in Ishtar's open manner, and cast a suspicious gaze upon him. One of the envoy's bodyguards also looked the Hero up and down in an appraising manner.

Being discomfited by their gazes, Kouki answered them.

"Well, may I speak? As to whether we defeated it...ah, would you like to look at a map of the 66th floor?"

Kouki proposed various proofs, but the envoy shook his head and allowed a smile to drift onto his face.

"No, thank you. There is a quicker method than that. Would you have a mock battle with one of my guards? That way, I would be able to see your strength immediately, Sir Hero."

"Well, I don't mind, but..."

Kouki looked back at the king, slightly puzzled. Having caught that

look, the king himself turned to Ishtar for his approval. He nodded. With Ehit's authority behind him, it would have been an easy matter to convince the empire to accept Kouki as humanity's leader, but a real battle was the quickest way to make the meritocratic empire truly recognize him as such.

"Very well. Sir Kouki, show them your strength as you desire."

"It's decided then. Well, we will impose upon you to prepare a location."

So it was in this abrupt manner that the mock battle between the hero and the envoy's bodyguard was decided.

Kouki's opponent could not be a more ordinary person. He was neither particularly tall nor short, bereft of any notable features, and had a face one could easily lose sight of in a crowd. At first blush, there was nothing "strong" about him at all.

He held his large edgeless sword downward casually – a stance that may as well not have been one at all.

Kouki was a little angered by this. He would give this person a taste of his spirit with the first blow, and make him devote himself seriously as well.

"Here I come!"

Kouki came in like the wind. His swift "High Speed Movement" narrowed the space between them at once as he swung his bamboo sword down with a powerful whipping sound. If this was an ordinary warrior, he would have had trouble even perceiving it. Of course, Kouki intended to stop just before hitting. But there was no point worrying about that. Rather, it was Kouki who was going to get a taste of 'proof' from the outcome.

CRACK!

"Guh!"

The one blown away was Kouki. The bodyguard readied his sword after that swing, glaring at him. At the instant where he had stopped

his simulated attack and relaxed, his opponent had casually knocked his sword upward, causing him to be pushed back.

"Haaa...Hey, hey, hero, is that all you've got? Everything? What happened to your motivation?"

Rude words that ill-befit an ordinary face came from the bodyguard as his expression showed first astonishment, and then gave way to rising disappointment.

Indeed, Kouki had made such a casual thrust from the front because he had judged the bodyguard based on his appearance, and he had clearly been repulsed in his present state.

Having come to a realization about himself due to this experience with his opponent, he was once again angry – but this time the anger was self-directed.

(TN: Not sure about this paragraph, because the author uses the term 'composition' for some reason that my lousy Japanese won't let me perceive; I replace it therefore with 'state', which I can see fitting into the English)

"I'm sorry. Please take care of me once more."

This time Kouki's eyes were serious, even as he apologized for his poor manners. Seeing him like this, the bodyguard made a displeased face and said,

"There are no 'next times' on the battlefield."

Nonetheless, he resumed his natural stance, indicating that he would continue.

Letting out a battle cry, Kouki charged.

Enhanced by "High Speed Movement", the bamboo blade swung diagonally down, upwards, and then forwards in a thrust. The swiftness was such that wavering afterimages were left behind in Kouki's wake.

But even against such a storm of sword-blows, the guard seemed to dodge using only the bare minimum of movements, looking

for a chance to counterattack. Even when he lost track of Kouki's movements and was attacked in his blind spot, he could still fend the hero off.

The guard's movements caused Kouki to remember something – Knight Captain Meld. There were already considerable differences in their specs, but so far he had been unable to surpass him in a mock battle. The reason for this was an overwhelming difference in combat experience.

Most likely, the guard was the same, having stood on many battlefields before this one, and his combat experience could fill up the gap in their specs. In short, this person was on the same level as or even

above Meld.

"Hmm. I guess at this level of physical ability an ordinary man wouldn't be your match. Still, there's something missing. You didn't have any affinity for battle originally, right?"

"Huh? Um, yes, that's true. I was a mere student at first."

"And now you're the 'Apostle of God', huh."

Ishtar and his associates from the church snorted in displeasure at the guard.

"Hey, hero. Prepare yourself, I'll be going at you from here on out. Don't go easy on me, or you might get killed."

So declaring, he charged. This charge was a not high speed movement on Kouki's level. Instead, it felt almost slow...and yet,

"Tch?!"

As the guard approached his blade seemed to leap upwards from below, causing Kouki to retreat in alarm. But like an attracted magnet, the blade maintained the distance between them, moving in like a whip as it struck.

The sword's trajectory was irregular and the movements hard to perceive, and while the use of "Foresight" allowed him to momentarily put some distance between them, he was unable to fully break away. Even when he

tried to used "High-Speed Movement" to break off in one go, his opponent would foresee it, and launch pre-emptive strikes such that he could not activate it. Gradually, impatience began to show on Kouki's face.

"Pierce, Wind Strike."

At the murmured aria a cluster of wind formed, and struck him squarely in the leg.

"Uwah?!"

Caught in mid-step, Kouki's leg swung outward and his balance was broken. In that instant, a fierce bloodlust pierced him. The guard's cold gaze met his, and he swung his blade downward with an

unbelievable pressure.

He's going to kill me, Kouki suddenly realized. (TN: Well, we're slow aren't we?)

Indeed, the guard could not help but think this way. If Kouki could not keep up with his attacks, his intent was to kill him rather than allow a boy who knew nothing of killing to become humanity's leader. This would certainly invite censure from the likes of the church, but to put incompetent allies on the battlefield was much harder to stomach. As such, this might be the better choice, or so he felt.

(TN: Another paragraph that I sucked at translating. I pray this is

at least 50% accurate.)

But the swing would never happen.

BOOOOM

"Guh!?"

The exact same scenario occurred as it did previously, but this time it was the guard getting blown away. Bounding away several times with both hands to negate the momentum, the guard looked at Kouki. His whole body was emitting a pure white aura, and he swung his sword to face his opponent while taking up a stance.

At the moment when the guard let fall his blade, Kouki's survival instincts had kicked in and activated his "Limit Break". This

technique caused all his parameters to multiply three times – a 'technique for a pinch' unique to a protagonist.

However, his face was hardly composed. Desperately repressed fear from being so close to death was in his expression as he held his sword.

Seeing this, the guard's fearless grin resurfaced.

"Hey, that's a slightly better face. Compared to that wimpy one from before, that is."

"Wimpy face? I'm frightened. Were you trying to kill me just now? Wasn't this a mock battle?"

"So what? Did you think that in a

real battle, we'd just go "okay, it's over"? You'd end up dead like that. You're supposed to stand above us humans and lead us – are you even aware of that?"

"I'm aware...of course I will save everyone!"

"What can a kid who's afraid of getting hurt do? Someone who doesn't even have bloodlust in his sword shouldn't talk big. Well then, are you ready? I said it at the start... that you'll die if you go easy on me!"

Once again, the guard advanced, an abnormal feeling of bloodlust coming off him, putting pressure on Kouki, who gathered strength in his legs, his face twisting painfully as he did so.

But he did not charge. A barrier of light had fallen between him and Kouki.

"This much will do. At this rate, it'll stop being a mock battle and become a killing duel instead. You have overstepped yourself with this joke, Lord Gahard."

"Tch, I've been found out. As shrewd as ever, old man."

Ishtar, having erected that shimmering barrier, proceeded to pour a wet blanket on "Lord Gahard" the guard, who cursed inaudibly in response, sheathed his sword in his shoulder-mounted scabbard, and took off his right earring.

The air around the guard turned a misty white, and when it finally cleared again, there appeared a totally different person.

It was a man who looked to be in his forties. His silver hair was cropped short, and his blue eyes were reminiscent of a wild wolf. His figure was slender but highly muscled, his clothes wrapping tightly around them almost to the point of bursting.

On seeing him, a commotion broke out.

"Lord Gahard!"

"Your Imperial Highness!"

Indeed, this man was Gahard D. Hoelscher, present Emperor of the

Hoelscher Empire, in disguise. Seeing this, King Erihid furrowed his brows and asked:

"Just what were you intending, Emperor Gahard?"

"There, there, King Erihid. I apologize for not introducing myself. However, a little play-fighting was the quickest way for me to make sure. This is of great importance to our future battles. Please excuse my rudeness."

Though Gahard excused himself this way, his expression was hardly apologetic. "Well, fine", Erihid seemed to indicate with a sigh.

Kouki was totally stunned. Somehow, this emperor was kind of

flighty, and his 'surprises' seemed to be treated as the norm too.

With that, the mock battle ended, and at the dinner that was arranged the empire gave their official words of recognition to the hero. For the time being, it seemed like the objectives of their visit had been met.

But that night, when a subordinate asked him about his real intentions in a room, the king gave a bothersome answer.

"Meh, he's no use. Just a kid. A mouth that believes unswervingly in stuff like ideals and justice. His rash strength and charisma are a bad combination, and he's the type who would get killed for his ideals.

But we can't neglect him since he's the "Apostle of God". All in all, he isn't good."

(TN: Take this paragraph with a healthy pinch of salt. My translation of these sentences is definitely iffy due to an overabundance of katana in colloquial use – which I am failing to grasp even with the dictionary.)

"So, you intended to kill him during that match?"

"What? No. I just thought I might fix his cowardly attitude with a beating. I wouldn't have killed him even if the Pope hadn't intervened."

It seemed like the Emperor did not regard Kouki and the rest of the

heroes to be worth his attention. This was not unreasonable. Up till a few months ago they had been mere students; in peaceful Japan no less. They did not have the readiness on the battlefield that a seasoned warrior would recognize.

"Well, the war with the demons may pick up the pace soon. We'll see about it then. For now, let's prioritize tactfully keeping ourselves from being involved with that kid...and to watch out for the Pope."

"As you will."

He had no intention to reveal his real estimation, however, and the very next day Kouki and the other heroes would see him off when he

returned to his country; with his business finished, there was no reason to stay any longer. Indeed, he seemed a very flighty Emperor.

By the way, there was an incident in which the emperor came across Shizuku during her morning training, and being pleased with her he requested rather earnestly that she become his lover. Upon her polite refusal, he just gave his usual plucky laugh and a "well, I'm not in a hurry" as his reply, indicating that this matter wasn't of great importance to him. At that moment, he caught side of Kouki and laughed through his nose at him. Kouki for his part got the feeling that they would never get along, and was momentarily displeased by this.

It also goes without saying that Shizuku's sighs increased.

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